

Conquering Your Jerichos, Part Three

Joshua 5:10-12

As a young boy, one of my favorite pastimes was playing baseball. Whether it was what is termed as “sandlot ball,” or in an organized league, I lived for those days in the year when we could play. There are many things I remember about the two men who gave up many afternoons, Saturdays and evenings to work with a bunch of boys. One of the things I remember most about Mr. Brantley and Mr. Peters was the way they would gather our team together before the game to go over our “signals.”

“Signals” are those gestures and motions which the base coach would make in the direction of the boy at the plate ready to hit, or in the direction of the runners on base, telling them what he wanted them to do in any particular situation. Touching the bill of his cap might mean that he wanted the batter to bunt the ball; if the coach wanted the base runner to steal on the next pitch he might tug at his ear lobe. You can understand why it was important that every player on the team knew what the signals were. This was part of our preparation before we could play the game.

It wasn’t a game, but the Hebrews had to get their “signals” straight, in a way. There were some vitally important things they had to know before they could begin their conquest of Canaan. God was preparing His people for the tremendous challenge ahead of them. To give them time to learn these essentials, and build them into their lives, God delayed the Israelites just after they had crossed the Jordan River.

As we have looked at these essentials in the last two weeks we have discovered that these are the same things we need in order to conquer the “Jerichos” we face in our own lives. In Joshua 4:24-5:1, we saw that the first essential was evidence of supernatural power at work in our lives. In 5:2-10, we saw that conquering our Jerichos also requires the renewal of basic commitments.

Today we turn to 5:10-12 to see a third essential the Israelites had to have in their lives before they could go up against Jericho. It is an essential which must be found in our lives, too, if we are going to be victorious against the challenges we face in our lives.

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In these verses, we see an astonishing thing. For forty years, the people had been eating manna which God had provided for them. There was a time when, because of the complaining of the Israelites, that God sent a huge flock of quail to them so they would have meat to eat. But probably most of these people had never eaten anything else. They had never planted a seed and watched it grow. They had never watered and tended the tender plants. They just simply went out and gathered the manna off the ground early every morning except the Sabbath. That's all there was to it.

But now God began to work in a different way in the lives of His people. Because it was different than anything they had ever experienced, the Hebrews had to develop this third essential: an openness to the workings of God in their lives, even if it wasn't the way things had always been done.

The closer we grow to Christ, the more we discover today that conquering our Jerichos requires the same kind of openness to the ways God chooses to work among us. What happens when we open ourselves to the workings of God? Today, let's look at three beautiful results:

1 The power of God is activated, v. 11

Verse eleven reads, *"The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain."* Here is probably what happened: as the Israelites advanced across the Jordan River, those Canaanites who lived between Jordan and the city of Jericho quite likely packed up as many belongings as they could and fled for the protection offered by the walls of Jericho. Wouldn't we?

When Rahab the harlot had hidden the two spies on her rooftop, she had covered them with stalks of flax, which she had spread out there to dry. It is obvious that the stalks had just been cut. That tells us that the barley was also ready for harvest. So when the Hebrew people moved into the land, there were the crops just waiting for them! In His providence and power, God had timed the entrance of His people into Canaan at just the right moment, and had put such fear into the hearts of the inhabitants of the land (v.1), that they totally abandoned the crops they had cared for all season!

The Hebrews were learning something new about the Lord God: He uses different methods to accomplish His purpose in the lives of His people. Because He is God, He is not limited to only one way of meeting the needs His people have. He was not restricted to providing manna, as great a miracle as that was. Here was an

important lesson for the Israelites—and for us: it was just as miraculous that God should have had the crops ready when His people arrived. What a testament to His power that was!

These people had already proven their willingness to follow God. Their eagerness to obey the Lord was stretched again and again as they crossed the Jordan, as they piled up the stones as a memorial and as they submitted to circumcision. They were open and receptive to what God was doing! It was that unqualified acceptance of the workings of God in their lives that activated the power of God even further for them.

When you and I are open to what God is doing in our lives and in our church—even if it *is* brand new—the power of God is activated in our lives in a fresh way. In the way that the barley was there waiting for the Hebrew people to claim it as their own, so the power of God is waiting for us to dare to claim it as our very own.

We can illustrate this very simply: One of the last things you probably did before you left your house this morning to come to the church building was to turn off the lights. Now, the lights may not be burning, but at this very moment there is coursing through the walls of your house just as much electricity as when the lights *are* burning. It is there, just as powerful as before. It is just as able to benefit you, even though the wall switch may in the “off” position.

It is when you go to the wall switch and turn it on that the power and benefits of electricity are activated in your house. So it is with the power of God. It is there all the time, waiting for us to claim it as our own, waiting for us to open up to the wonderful ways that God chooses to work in our lives.

Has the power of God been activated in your life today?

2 Our spiritual growth is stimulated, v. 11

Deep meditation on verses 11-12 will reveal another result of the Israelites being open to the way God was working this new thing in their lives. We read that the day after they observed the Passover that the manna ceased, and they no longer could go out in the morning and pick it up. It was gone—gone forever.

As they began to experience more and more of the power of God on a personal basis, it was inevitable that they should experience a spurt in their spiritual growth. They had been depending on God all their lives to provide the manna early in the

morning, but now that the manna has ceased, they will have to learn to depend on God in a fresh way.

It may have been that the manna had seemed less and less of a miracle because God had given it every day for forty years. Perhaps they had grown so accustomed to it that their ability to depend on God had grown stagnant. Out there, ahead of them in Canaan, these people were going to have to depend on God as they never had to before. To learn to depend on God more than ever, they were going to have to develop in their spiritual lives.

Can you imagine the Hebrews refusing to go out in the fields to gather the grain, saying, “This manna was good enough for my daddy, so it’s good enough for me!”? “We’ve always had this manna, and it’s served us well all these years. We don’t need this ‘new’ food.”

As ridiculous as that sounds to our ears, remember that many times we sound just like that. Perhaps we don’t realize what we’re doing. We’re living on the “manna,” continuing with the same old spiritual diet, when God says it’s time to move on to the rest of the menu! One man was visiting in a home where a little boy was vigorously riding a rocking horse. After watching the little boy for some time, he remarked, “He reminds me of some Christians. There is plenty of motion but no progress.” It’s time to get off the rocking horse, leave the ABC’s of the Gospel behind us, and grow in Christ!

The manna was a wilderness food, specially designed by God to meet the needs of His people while they were in the desert. It obviously had all the vitamins and minerals a human body could need, since they had nothing else to eat. They had never heard their mothers say, “Eat your spinach,” because they didn’t have any. There were no pizzas, no tomatoes, no deer meat, no catfish—there was just the manna. But now God had provided something else for them—the produce of the land.

Some might ask, “Why did God take away this *miracle* food, and replace it with common, ordinary grain?” There’s a very simple answer to that question: it is because God most often chooses to use common, ordinary methods to meet the needs of His people. A study of the Scriptures will reveal that it is most often when the laws of nature, or our own resources, are exhausted that God intervenes with what we call a “miracle.”

Is something any less of a miracle because we see it every day? Is the singing of a bird any less a miracle because we hear it every morning? Or the setting of the sun every evening, or the changing of the seasons with regularity, or a little child spontaneously laughing? Is the loving way in which God provides for us every day of our lives any less a miracle because it *does* happen every day? No, in each of these things, and many more, the miracles are that these beautiful things *do* happen all the time, without fail. Let us never fail to remember that we ourselves are walking, talking, breathing miracles, and that we live in a veritable sea of miracles. As the poet Walt Whitman expressed it so well,

*To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same;
Every spear of grass—the frames, limbs, organs, of men and women, and all
that concerns them,
All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles.*

The sensation caused by miracles is fine when we are still wandering out there in the wilderness, but there should come a time in our lives in Christ when we become aware of God at work in our lives through many other ways as well. In the *Wall Street Journal*, there once appeared an advertisement with these words:

“Most of us miss out on life’s big prizes. The Pulitzer. The Nobel. Oscars. Tonys. Emmys. But we’re all eligible for life’s small pleasures. A pat on the back. A kiss behind the ear. A four-pound bass. A full moon. An empty parking space. A crackling fire. A great meal. A glorious sunset. Hot soup. Cold drinks. Don’t fret about coping life’s grand awards. Enjoy its tiny delights. There are plenty for all of us.”

Whoever wrote that may not have known it, but they were expressing an often-overlooked truth about spiritual growth! Too often we feel that there must be some spectacular miracle before we can receive a blessing. When we are still quite young in Christ (and this has nothing to do with our chronological age!) we depend on that emotional excitement and those spiritual thrills to boost our life in Christ. But as we grow older in Christ (not necessarily older in our age!) we learn that a sign of our spiritual maturity is that we are less and less dependent on the spectacular. You see, when there has to be a tremendously moving worship service for us to see the workings of God in our midst, then we are unable to hear the voice of God through the ordinary. When we have to experience cold chills before we

can know the sweet Presence of God, then we fail to realize that God has promised to be with us at all times, not just when we have cold chills!

Opening ourselves up to the wonderful and varied ways that God works in our lives will result in the stimulation of our spiritual growth. The stagnant waters are washed away! The stale air is replaced with the refreshing breath of the Spirit. Does *your* spiritual growth need to be stimulated today?

3 Our resolve to move forward is motivated, v. 12

Verse twelve reads, *“The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.”* God was sending them another message. He was saying to them, “You’re in a strange land. You’ve never been here before. It’s natural that you should be timid and perhaps afraid of what is just ahead of you. I know that! But this is *your* home now! You’re not going to need this manna anymore, because you’re not going back to the wilderness anymore. You’re going ahead. Sure there are challenges and problems ahead of you. But I’ve always provided for you in the past as long as you’ve been faithful to Me, and as long as you are faithful I will provide for you in the future. My methods may change. The ways in which I work in your life may change. But I am still here.”

They were here to stay. There was no turning back from here on. You’ve heard the expression “Burning your bridges behind you”? That’s what was happening here. They couldn’t return to the wilderness because there was no more manna out there. That bridge was burned, so to speak. The only direction in which they could move was forward, always forward. Being humans, they needed proper motivation to begin their conquest of the land. And it was only as they opened themselves up to the numerous and varied ways God was dealing with them that they were motivated to continue.

Several years ago a comic strip by Mort Walker entitled *Beetle Bailey* showed Beetle still in bed, wondering to himself out loud, “I’ve been giving it some thought. I’m not cut out for big things in life. I guess climbing to the heights is not for me. I’ve got to be realistic. I’m just not going to get very far.”

In the last frame, a couple of his buddies are watching on, and one of them remarks, “I don’t think he’s even going to make it out of bed.”

There are some Christians who will never “make it out of bed” in a spiritual sense, because their hearts and minds are closed to the fact that God works in many

different ways to accomplish His purposes in our lives. If God is always going to work in my life in the same way as He has in the past, then there's no need for me to advance any further in my life in Christ than I am right now. But if God is constantly changing the methods and the ways in which He deals with me and the ways in which He leads in my life, then I am motivated to move forward, deeper into my spiritual Canaan!

I begin to see the blessings which God has put out there for me that say to me, "This 'Canaan' into which I have led you is your home now. There's no need for you to retreat into your wilderness of sin and darkness and confusion. But it's not my will for you to camp out on the banks of the Jordan forever, either. It's time to move forward! It's time to advance against all the Jerichos in front of you!"

Ceasing to provide the manna was God's way of teaching the people this third essential for conquering Canaan: He was working in their lives in a new and fresh way they had never seen before, and they had to be open to all the ways He would work in their lives in the future. Their openness and receptivity to these various ways God was working had three beautiful results in their lives. When we are open to the working of God in our lives today, we discover these same timeless truths to be in effect for us:

The power of God is activated
Our spiritual growth is stimulated
Our resolve to move forward is motivated

We're not playing baseball here, but let's get our signals straight. If God were to take away **your** manna this morning, what would **you** do? You might not even notice! If you were aware of it, you would have a lot of choices available to you. The best choice is to be open and receptive to what God wants to do in you and through you.

Why not commit your life right now to this God who never gets stagnant in His dealings with us? Why not commit your life right now to this God who is always dealing with us in fresh, vibrant ways?