

Conquering Your Jerichos, Part Four

Joshua 5:13-16

While serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force, John Gillespie Magee, Jr., was killed in 1941 at the age of nineteen. Shortly before his death, Flight-Lieutenant Magee, the son of American missionaries to China, while flying at an altitude of thirty thousand feet above England, composed the words to a poem which he entitled “High Flight.” Today that poem is the official poem of the Canadian Forces Air Command, and is required to be recited by memory by freshmen cadets at the United States Air Force Academy. Many headstones in Arlington National Cemetery contain portions of Magee’s work.

In that poem, Magee expressed the joys of experiencing the very presence of God while flying far above the clouds:

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I’ve climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds—and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov’ring there,
I’ve chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.*

*Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I’ve topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew—
And, while with silent lifting mind I’ve trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.*

The presence of God! So mysterious, sometimes seeming to be so elusive, sometimes seeming to be so beyond our reach, and yet at other times, so very close and near. The presence of God is that essential of our experience in Christ which has helped us through so many trials, so many crises, so many dangers, so many temptations. We may not have always been aware of God’s presence with us at the time, but looking back, we are convinced that we have emerged victoriously because of the fact that God, through His Holy Spirit, has been with us, just as He said He would be. In all the Jerichos we’ve faced and overcome, it was through the presence of God with us.

Why should Joshua have been any different? If anyone needed to know the presence of God, it was Joshua! Behind him were an estimated two million Hebrews waiting for Joshua to lead the way, depending on his leadership. In front of him was the walled, fortified city of Jericho, whose walls had been described as reaching up to heaven (Deuteronomy 1:28). That city had to be conquered if the Hebrew people were going to advance any further into this land God had given them. Joshua knew what pressure was.

God had given the Hebrews time to learn some essentials they were going to need in their lives if they were going to conquer Jericho, as well as the other cities in front of them. These essentials had to be deeply engrained in their hearts. These essentials are just as necessary in our lives today if we are going to live victorious lives in Christ, conquering our own Jerichos today.

In order to be victorious, God's people need, first of all, indisputable evidence of the supernatural at work in our lives. The second essential in the life of a victorious Christian is a renewal of our basic commitment to Jesus as Lord. Then, because God is not limited to doing things the way He has always done them, and because He sometimes leads His people into places and experiences we've not known, the third essential is an openness to the workings of God in our lives, and the changes He sometimes brings.

This morning, let us imagine ourselves with Joshua, perhaps alone on a mountain overlooking Jericho. Joshua had a marvelous experience there, in which God taught Joshua the fourth essential for conquering the Jericho which stood in front of him. Even leaders—or should we say, especially leaders—have to be led. Before Joshua could lead the Hebrews into battle in their conquest of the land, God had to remind him of an important truth absolutely indispensable for victory: a fresh awareness of the presence of God in his life.

Joshua knew this already. In Joshua 1:5, God had promised Joshua *“No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you.”* In verse nine of that same chapter, God repeated the promise: *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”* And now, God reinforces that promise in a special way, as we read in 5:13-16.

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A fresh awareness of the presence of God in our lives—it must be there! That is why, over and over again, God tells us in His Word of His promise to never leave us or forsake us. That is why Jesus told us Himself: “*If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5b). Let us say it again, plainly so no one will misunderstand: Conquering our personal Jerichos requires a fresh awareness of the presence of God in our lives.

But how can we receive this fresh awareness? Is there some magic formula to follow? There *are* some principles, but there’s nothing magical about them at all. We see these principles in the experience Joshua had.

1 We must have a secluded spirit, v. 13

It appears from what we read in verse thirteen that Joshua was alone. Perhaps he had separated himself from the crowds—perhaps two million people!—in order to concentrate on the enormity of the task ahead. How many battering rams would it take to knock down those walls? How many ladders? What would be the best approach to take in attacking the city? There had to have been so many things running through his head.

It is a well-recognized characteristic of those who would lead others, that they must take the time to be alone so they can concentrate on the tasks for which they are responsible. It was while Joshua was alone that he received this fresh awareness of the presence of God.

The same is true for us. Receiving a fresh awareness of God’s presence in our lives demands that we develop a secluded spirit. What is a “secluded spirit”? It is simply the spirit inside you that says that every once in a while you must get alone with God in solitude. You see, being alone and being lonely are not the same thing, but there are a lot of people who are afraid of being alone. There are people who, perhaps because of recurring loneliness, dread those times in the day when he or she will be alone, separated from others.

There was an article in *USA TODAY* several years ago that focused on loneliness. It was entitled “*We can gain strength from our solitude.*” From an entirely secular viewpoint, the article promoted the advantages of being alone. The author of the article wrote, “Many of us who have faced loneliness and learned to deal with it have found, in the end, that being alone can actually be good for us. It’s a

discovery that often comes as a surprise, because cultural conditioning has made us self-conscious about spending time alone.”

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, pioneering aviator and wife of Charles Lindbergh, once wrote:

“Unfortunately the world today does not seem to understand, in either man or woman, the need to be alone. Anything else will be accepted as a better excuse. If one sets time aside for a shopping expedition, that time is accepted as inviolable; but if one says, ‘I cannot come because it is my hour to be alone,’ one is considered rude, egotistical, or strange.”

Peter Suedfeld, psychology professor at the University of British Columbia, once led the medical world to re-discover what God has been saying all along. They even developed a name for it: “isolation therapy.” He has said, “One of the interesting things we’ve found in our experiments is that people who are put into isolated environments for even short periods are suddenly able to overcome difficulties that have been plaguing them for quite some time. [These are those personal Jerichos we’ve been talking about!] Overeating, for example, or smoking. They come out of their isolation having licked the problem, all because they had the time to sit and think about it.”

Interesting, isn’t it, that the secular world has come to understand something we see in the Scriptures? From a Christian perspective, it isn’t exactly “isolation therapy” or just being alone for an hour, because we are never really alone, are we? When the Christian makes a determined effort to enter seclusion, it is in order to be alone with God. So whether you call it isolation therapy, or whether you simply recognize it as a principle necessary for conquering the problems of life, building some time into your life and schedule to be alone with God is not a luxury, but a necessity.

It is important to understand that there is a vast difference between being lonely and being alone. It is also important to distinguish between being alone with God in solitude, and merely being alone. The man or woman of God thrives on the times when he or she can be alone with God, just being still and quiet before Him. As Walter Savage Landor wrote, "A solitude is the audience-chamber of God."

2 A searching heart, v. 13b

While Joshua was alone, looking for comfort and courage for what was just ahead, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him, with a sword drawn and ready to use. So Joshua, with the boldness of a courageous

leader, went up to him and asked him “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

You would expect that the answer to a question such as that would be either “I’m for you,” or “I’m for your enemies.” But to Joshua’s question, the man replied, “No.” What kind of answer is that? It’s like asking someone, “Is it raining or is the sun shining?” and being told “No.”

What the man meant was “I’m not *for* either side. I’m here to command the army which is on the side of the Lord.” I heard this paraphrased many years ago: “I’ve not come to take *sides*; I’ve come to *take over*.”

Who this man was, we can only guess—but it’s a very close guess! I believe this was Jesus, making a very special appearance in the flesh even before He was actually born! We call it “pre-incarnate,” because it happened before the time Jesus came in the flesh. It would happen again—He appeared in the flaming furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel’s time. An important clue is to be found in what this man said about himself: “*As commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come.*”

The word “commander” is the same word used in Isaiah 9:6 to describe the coming Messiah as the “Prince” of Peace. The *King James Version* uses the word “captain” here, and Hebrews 2:9-10 describes Jesus as the Captain of our Salvation.

So Joshua experienced a fresh awareness of the presence of God because he had a searching heart. In this short exchange with the Pre-Incarnate Christ he demonstrated that he had a heart sincerely eager to search out and find God’s will and plan. Receiving a fresh awareness of God’s presence demands that you and I have the kind of heart that is hungry for fellowship with God. We cannot know the presence of God through the nonchalant, take-it-or-leave-it attitude so many American Christians have grown comfortable with. It requires developing a heart that cries out for fellowship with God.

3 A servant attitude, v. 14

Notice Joshua’s reaction to the news that this man is the commander of the army of the Lord. He didn’t say, “Wait a minute! I’m in charge here!” He didn’t ask to know what the outcome of the battle would be. We read in verse fourteen that he “*fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, ‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’*”

Joshua realized Who was really in charge, so his first reaction was to find out what his orders were! Joshua had been developing this servant attitude for quite a while. It didn't come overnight. Remember that he had been Moses' assistant, and he had played "second fiddle" to Moses for a long time. Only recently had Joshua assumed command of the Israelites.

The same is true of us. Receiving a fresh awareness of God's presence in our lives demands that we develop a servant attitude, ready to serve God at any time He calls upon us, anytime He shows up in our lives with a special assignment.

So what is a "servant attitude," exactly? We can look right here in verse fourteen to find two ingredients. ***First, there must be a readiness to serve.*** It is the attitude of heart and spirit that asks, "What do You want me do, Lord?" It is the attitude of that believer who stays at the ready, willing to serve God at any time in any way He directs. It is the believer whose heart wakes up in the morning and says "What are my orders for today, Lord?" There must be a readiness to serve.

Second, there must be a willingness to obey. This is when we actually do what we are commanded to do. In verse fifteen, the commander of the Lord's army told Joshua, in words which reminded him and remind us today of the commission given to Moses at the burning bush: "*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.*" Look what Joshua's response was—"*And Joshua did so.*"

There must be both aspects to have a genuine servant attitude—a readiness to serve, and a willingness to obey. Some of us want to know what God's will is, but then we never get around to actually doing God's will. We wait for some new command from God, but what we need to do is to begin to obey the old commands He's already given!

Today, perhaps you are standing just on the brink of going up against the biggest obstacle and challenge in your life so far. There may be a good bit of confusion and uncertainty swirling around in your heart right now, but one thing you know you need, and that is a keen awareness of God's presence with you right now. You want to know that God is actually with you.

Like John Gillespie Magee, you want more than anything right now to be able to "put out" your "hand, and touch the face of God." To conquer your personal Jericho, whatever form it has taken for you, you must experience a fresh awareness of God's presence in your life. To do that, you must have:

A secluded spirit
A searching heart
A servant attitude

Are you willing to stand with Joshua, and hear the Lord say to you, “The ground you stand on is holy”? Are you willing to seek His presence and His face, so you will know the path you should take? And are you willing to follow Him and do what He says?