

Conquering Your Jerichos, Part Five

Joshua 6:1-17, 20-21

IF you were to make a list of the obstacles and challenges in your life right now, what would that list include? Temptations? Doubt? Bitterness or an unforgiving spirit? A lust for power? Is it resentment toward someone who has betrayed your trust? Is it an illness that seems to linger on and on? Have you lost someone you deeply loved? Would your list include an addiction to alcohol or drugs?

Would you include problems in your home or marriage? Is someone trying to wield their control over your life? Is your Jericho a recurring sense of loneliness? Is it a barrage of confusing emotions? Is it a struggle between parent and child? Is it nagging uncertainty about your job or your future security? Or an overwhelming sense of frustration over life in general?

For the last four weeks, we've been calling those kinds of challenges and obstacles—and others like them—our own personal “Jerichos,” remembering that once, the Hebrews faced a very real city of Jericho. It stood between them and victory in conquering the land of Canaan. God had promised to give Jericho to them, but it would not be gift-wrapped. It would require some effort on their part. In order to prepare them, God gave His people the opportunity to instill some basic essentials into their lives.

So in order to capture the flow of what God was trying to say to His people, and what He's been trying to say to us for the past month, let's briefly list those essentials for conquering our personal Jerichos:

- 1. Evidence of supernatural power at work in our lives, 4:24-5:1**
- 2. The renewal of a basic commitment to Jesus as Lord, 5:2-10**
- 3. An openness to the changes God sometimes brings, 5:10-12**
- 4. A fresh awareness of the presence of God, 5:13-16**

These Hebrew people had all that, but Jericho still lay out there in front of them. Its walls blocked their entrance into Canaan just as surely as before. That's because there was one essential yet to be discovered and applied. You see, an essential is that which belongs to the very nature of something, which if removed, would result in the destruction of that thing.

For example, two essentials for the composition of a drop of water are hydrogen and oxygen. What makes them essential is that hydrogen and oxygen must be present in the right amounts before water is formed. They are part of the nature of what makes water, water! Should you take away either of the two essentials of hydrogen or oxygen, you would be destroying that drop of water.

We have called these various parts of victory “essentials” because when you remove even one of them, you no longer have victory. Each of them is essential in the overall nature of the victorious Christian life. To have victory in your walk with Christ, to conquer your Jerichos, you must have each of these essentials built into your lifestyle. So let’s just say that you have carefully given attention to these fundamentals in your heart and life, and yet, you are as defeated as before. The Jericho in your life looms as large as ever. What’s next?

Perhaps you’ve figured out by this time that the one essential still remaining to be discovered and applied was that of unhesitating obedience. The Hebrews had to obey God without question or doubt in order to conquer Jericho. And we see in Scripture a lesson it sometimes takes all our lives to learn: Unhesitating obedience is fundamental to conquering our Jerichos.

But what does that mean? What kind of obedience is this? To have victory over our personal Jerichos, what should we do to have unhesitating obedience?

1 We should obey God trustingly

The Lord’s commands to Joshua involved something which simply did not make sense to the human mind. The people were to march around the city of Jericho once a day for six days, as we see in verse three. In verse four, seven priests were to march in front of the ark of the covenant, blowing trumpets made from rams’ horns.

On the seventh day, the people were to march around Jericho seven times. Look at what the Lord told Joshua in verse five: “*When you hear them [the priests] sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout...*” Then look at the unbelievable result which God said would happen: “*Then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.*”

No, it didn’t make any sense at all, but Joshua had learned to be obedient. He had just received a fresh awareness of the presence of God in his life, when the Lord appeared to him at the end of chapter five. One of the reasons Joshua had received this fresh awareness was because he had developed a servant attitude. You

remember that last week we defined a servant attitude as having two ingredients: a readiness to serve, and a willingness to obey. Joshua was more than ready to serve.

Now it was time to obey.

Joshua's willingness to obey can be seen in the little word "so" at the beginning of verse six. The King James Version uses the word "and" but the meaning is the same. Joshua received his orders, and even though they may have not made much sense to his human reasoning, still he was willing to obey.

When you read the Scriptures, it appears as if God sometimes goes out of His way to choose the most ridiculous way possible in which to work His will. Take the story of Gideon, for example. His story is found in chapters six, seven and eight of Judges. Gideon was from the smallest tribe of Israel, from the smallest family of that tribe, and he was the youngest in the family. Yet God chose him to lead the Israelites against the Midianites.

Gideon thought he needed as many volunteers as possible, but when thirty-two thousand men responded to the call, God said something which must have sent Gideon's head spinning: "You've got too many men, Gideon." One step at a time the numbers were diminished, first from 32,000 to 10,000, but still God said there were too many. Once more the forces were slashed, until there only three hundred men left to advance into battle against an army which the Bible describes as being "thick as locusts" (Judges 7:12). It didn't make any sense, but it worked anyway, because Gideon obeyed God trustingly.

There are many other examples in the Scriptures. Naaman sought a cure from his leprosy, but instead of uttering some magic hocus-pocus over him, God's prophet sent a messenger to tell Naaman to go wash in the muddy Jordan River seven times. You won't find that cure in any medical book; it came straight from the heart of God. It didn't make any sense; there's no logic behind it, but it worked when Naaman obeyed trustingly.

Jesus once told Simon to push his boats out into the deep water to let down his nets for a catch (Luke 5:4ff). It didn't make any sense to Simon, because they had been working hard all night long, but had caught nothing. But Simon was learning something vital to following Christ: he was learning that he must obey trustingly. When he did as Jesus instructed, the nets were so filled with fish that they began to break. It didn't make any sense, but it worked because God said it would!

When Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, it didn't make any sense. But because the disciples obeyed Jesus trustingly, and had the people sit down in groups as Jesus directed, they were all fed.

The supreme example is to be found in the death of Jesus on the cross. It didn't make any sense, and even today, people have trouble understanding it. It is totally unlike anything else we've experienced. A man dying on a Roman instrument of execution doesn't seem to be the way to overcome the world, and save us from our sins. The Romans certainly weren't impressed.

Even today, we feel that we must work extra hard to somehow earn our salvation. But that's not the way God has chosen. The Hebrews were learning at Jericho, and we must learn today, a principle for trusting God even when it doesn't make any sense. It was expressed years later by Zechariah the prophet: "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord*" (Zechariah 4:6).

2 We should obey God carefully

Joshua has asked in 5:14, "*What message does my Lord have for his servant?*" Now God tells him, and He was very specific concerning what the people were to do (vv. 3-5):

March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.

As the servant of the Lord, Joshua surely had further details, which we are correct in assuming came from God Himself. For example, we read in verses seven through nine about a particular order that the people were to follow as they marched. It appears that the armed guard was to go first, followed by the priests blowing the trumpets. Then there were the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and they in turn were followed by the rear guard. In verse ten, we learn that Joshua commanded the people to keep silent during their march, that they were not to say even one word.

There was much attention to detail, and God wanted His people to learn something from all of it. There were four sevens—seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days and seven times around the city on the seventh day. The number seven is used

through the Scriptures as the biblical number for completion. I believe God is saying to His people that the victory would be complete and it would be completely His! There is no failure when God is in control.

Another example of the detail given here is that if you count up the number of times the people went around the city, you will find that they marched a total of thirteen times. Why? Perhaps God wanted them to get a good look at the city and fully comprehend how strong and fortified Jericho really was—and how helpless they were unless God intervened.

The challenges of the past were nothing compared to those of the future. These people had to learn to depend fully on God.

And I believe God wanted the people to remain silent in order that they might fully comprehend the enormity and the utter impossibility of conquering Jericho. He wanted them to shout as a sign of victory and of calling the people to battle. We are reminded that the heavens appear to be silent at times in our day, but the day is coming when *“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

These Hebrew people had to obey God carefully, giving attention to every detail, no matter how trivial or insignificant it may have seemed. Our God is a God of the detail—just look at the cells of our bodies, our eyelashes, the veins of a tiny leaf, a wisp of cloud in the air! But more importantly, we must give attention to the details of following after Christ, lest we think that some of Christ’s commands apply and some do not. We are not obedient children unless we obey in every detail, giving attention to all particulars of what God commands.

3 We should obey God diligently

A careful reading of this passage will reveal something very important to our understanding of what obedience really is. Joshua knew what this was all about, but the people didn’t have a clue. Joshua did not tell them how many times they were to march around the city or what was going to happen when they were finished. He did not tell them what it was all for, or what they hoped to accomplish. They marched around the city on the first day, then returned to Gilgal, where they were camped. Nothing had happened.

That was the way it happened on the second day, and the third, and the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth. The walls were still standing. They were no closer to the conquest of Canaan than they had been before.

If some of us had been included in that assembly, we would have grumbled for all we were worth. I know I probably would have. We would have accused Joshua of inexperience and immaturity, because everyone knew that this was not the way to conquer a fortified city! We may have held secret meetings around the fire when we returned to camp that night, plotting or scheming some kind of mutinous takeover. At the very least, we would have folded our arms and said to others, “You can go out there and participate in this hare-brained scheme if you want to, but I’ve got too much sense for that. Sounds like a suicide mission!”

It was probably a good thing we weren’t there, because look at what happened. Though they may have not understood everything about it, they obeyed God all that week. They were diligent in their obedience, all the way through.

Sometimes we give up too easily. Two things which burden me about American Christians is (1) that we are so defeated; and (2) that we surrender too soon. We relinquish our rights as children of the Living God! We may start out to obey God, we may make a commitment to Him, join a church, enroll in Bible study or some training class, and so forth. We might even pray! All those are good things.

But when the miracles don’t happen, or when God won’t behave the way we desire, when the walls of our Jerichos don’t immediately come crashing down, we grow discouraged and quit. We fall by the wayside.

It was not until the Hebrew people had marched around the city once a day for six days, then seven times on the seventh day, did the walls fall. What if they had quit on the evening of the sixth day, or even on the seventh day after marching around the city six times? How many times have you failed to have victory in your life because you quit too soon? How many times have you been so close to spiritual victory, but you didn’t claim it as your own because you were not diligent enough in your obedience?

In verse twenty we can see what happened when the Hebrew people obeyed God trustingly, carefully and diligently: *“When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.”*

1 Peter 4:17 reads, “*For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us **what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?***” Hebrews 5:9 tells us that Christ “*became the source of eternal salvation for **all who obey him.***” And we learn in Acts 5:32 that the Holy Spirit is given to those who *obey* God.

Allow me to ask you a very serious question. Are you still camped outside the walls of your personal Jericho because you’ve quit too soon, or because you’ve not been willing to give God an unhesitating obedience in the things He has made clear to you?