

SESSION #13

JOSHUA (cont.)

We pick up the story of Joshua once again.

Chapters 6 through 12 give us the overcoming of the land as it continues the pictures that are very powerful illustrations of the Christian life. How do we as Christians gain victory in our day-to-day lives? Well, chapter 6, for example, gives us some of the principles of triumphant faith in the destruction of the city of Jericho. How is spiritual victory won?

Take a look at chapter 6 sometime and see how they did it and what they were doing. What did it mean in terms of how you and I can live as Christians? There are lots of wonderful principles in chapter 6 about how to be triumphant in faith living. We don't have time to explore them in this brief survey.

But here's one example. In the first 14 verses of chapter 6 you will see the "ark of the covenant" mentioned 10 times. And you will find that it is carried in the midst of the column of people marching around Jericho. As they faced Jericho, this first great obstacle in the Promised Land, God wanted them to focus on Him, His presence represented by the ark.

And when we face difficulties, "Jerichos", in our Christian walk God also wants us not to focus on the problem but to focus on His presence with us. He has not left us; He's right there and He wants to give you victory over that 'Jericho', whatever it may be.

(ADDITIONAL NOTE not included in the presentation:

Here's another example of a principle seen in the story of the taking of Jericho. Since the trumpets being blown as they walked around Jericho were ceremonial rams horns used for a call to worship, this undertaking was religious rather than military in nature. God was seeking to overcome the Israelites, not just the Canaanites. George Matheson wrote: *"The Lord often gives me a task that I do*

not understand. Sometimes beside the walls of my Jericho, God puts in my hands a trumpet when I think it should be a sword. I am sent on a long circuitous march when I expected to be retained for an assault. These moments are hard for me. It is not the work that is difficult but the lack of vision! It is easy enough to blow a trumpet or walk around an 'obstructing city'. The hard thing is to see the good of it. O Lord, help me at such moments to say, 'One step is enough for me!'))

But then chapter 7 introduces another aspect of reality because the Christian life isn't just up, up, up. It isn't just one triumph after another, Jericho walls going down one after another. Faith is disabled in chapter 7 because of the sin of one man by the name of Achan. And in this chapter we see something of the seriousness of sin among the people of God.

Achan makes a very interesting statement when he is finally spotlighted by God, pinpointed as the man who is causing all the trouble in the nation of Israel because of his sin. He uses four little words which describe not just what happened to Achan but describe what happens to millions of people in the years since.

He said, *"I went into this tent and I **saw** and I **coveted** and I **took** and I **hid**."* Ah, it's a downward slope that anybody can fall into, and Achan does.

He was not to take anything, nobody was to take anything, out of the city of Jericho for themselves. That first city was dedicated to God entirely. Everything went to God.

But here was a man who thought he could steal something that belonged to God and get away with it. He didn't and he died for his sin. Sin is utterly serious. It was serious for Achan and his family but it was serious for the people of Israel too – 36 of their soldiers died before they discovered who was the cause of the problem. And their ability to move forward in victory as a whole nation was absolutely disabled until they dealt with the issue of sin. It is always so for God's people, corporately and individually.

Chapter 8. Again another realistic picture. Just because we fail once somewhere doesn't mean God puts us on the rubbish heap and that's the end. He can re-empower us, he can move us forward again, if we will deal with sin and receive his cleansing.

Faith is re-empowered and the town that they had had such a terrible time trying to conquer, the little town of Ai, they finally do conquer as God shows them that faith can indeed be reactivated, be re-empowered.

Faith is in danger in chapter 9. The Gibeonites come with a very subtle trick reminding us of how subtle and how tricky Satan can be as he tempts God's people to do what is wrong.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 show us that faith is all-victorious. As they move from one place to the other they conquer throughout the land. This map gives you an idea of their campaigns of conquest. They move into the center to produce a wedge. Then they move down to the south. Then they move into the north. And they conquer the land of Canaan.

I'm reminded of a story I heard about a little boy who was being taught Bible stories by his rabbi. And he finally said, *"May I ask a question?"* And the rabbi replied, *"Sure, ask your question."* The little boy said, *"Well, the Bible says that the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, and the children of Israel built the temple, and the children of Israel did this, and the children of Israel did that. Didn't the grownups do anything?"*

Well, the grownups here did a lot and Joshua describes much of their activity as they overcome the land of Canaan.

Having then gained the victory throughout most of the land, they begin to occupy and settle down, town after town. And they divide up the land so that each of the tribes has a particular place which they can call their own. Chapters 13 to 24 give a lot of the details concerning that aspect. As they occupy the land, there's a couple of very important and helpful principles to note.

One is that God will give us victory as we move ahead in obedience to Him, but there's another principle from the book of Joshua that also applies to us. And that is stated back in chapter 1 verse 3, *"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread on, I will give it to you."* Now in general God had given them the whole land. It was already theirs in principle. But in reality, in practice, it wasn't theirs until they actually walked on it.

It reminds me of the story about William Penn, one of the early pioneers of the United States, after whom the state of Pennsylvania was named. He became a very good friend of the First Nation people who lived along the eastern seaboard of the US at that time. They became such good friends that the indigenous leaders in that territory finally told William, *“We would like to give you a gift. We will give you as much land as you can walk around in one day.”* William Penn liked the idea so he got up real early, and he started as fast as he could walk, and he walked in a great big circuit until evening when he reached his beginning spot. And the tribe kept their promise to give him whatever property he could walk around in one day. It’s now the city of Philadelphia – the city of brotherly love, commemorating the friendship between William Penn and that First Nation. That property became his by his walking around it and claiming it.

The people of Israel had to walk out into the land of Canaan. It was already theirs but in practice it wouldn’t become theirs until they walked on it. God has already given us *“every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”*. It’s all there, the potential is all there. There’s nothing more that He needs to give us. But we won’t experience it, we won’t appreciate it, we won’t be able to realize it in daily terms unless we put our foot down on some of those promises and claim them. In 2 Cor. 10 for example, Paul says, *“bringing every thought into captivity.”* That’s one way to begin to put your foot down and claim some of the blessings God promises to give us. Bringing our thoughts into captivity so that we’re in the place where God can bless us.

The other principle is very similar. In chapter 23 of Exodus, God had said, *“I will drive them out from before you in this way...”* – all at once? He could have dropped some kind of atomic bomb, and boom! – they’re all gone. No.

He said, *“I will drive them out from before you little by little, little by little.”* There were a number of reasons for that, but surely here’s a principle for our lives as well. God isn’t going to give you or me some kind of enormous spiritual victory that just comes kaboom! – and everything’s done – wrapped up, signed, sealed, delivered, and that’s it. It’s going to come little by little.

There are going to be some battles, there’ll be struggles, there’ll be some victories, there’ll be some defeats, there’ll be some discouragements and disappointments. But we

will move ahead into the blessings God has for us and He will make that way possible little by little as we move ahead with Him, in faith, as these people did.

So when you arrive at the end of Joshua, chapter 23, you get very much the same thing as happened with Moses: a farewell speech by the national leader, Joshua. In his farewell speech, chapters 23 & 24, he gives these three directives: obey God's word, hate sin and love God. In a way, it's that simple. Those were the key things that he wanted his people to grasp hold of and never forget after he had gone.

And surely those are key things for us as well. The whole book of Joshua has to do with the victory of faith, or facing the future with faith. And Joshua describes in wonderful terms how that can happen.

Elton Trueblood said, *"Faith is not belief without proof..."* Ah, there's lots of historical data, there's lot of examples we've looked at even in these first few books of the OT. *"Faith is not belief without proof; faith is trust without reservation."* The facts will only take us so far and then beyond that we need to say with God, *"Okay, I believe you. I'll put my hand in your hand even though I can't see where the next step will be. I'll walk with you because you are a faithful God."* Trusting Him just because He's trustworthy. And that can mean without reservation. A trusting faith like that of Joshua.

I hope you'll be back for the next session when we get into a book that is disturbingly different from this one.
