

[discipline]

:: Joshua 6.1-21 ::

*Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord Strong and Mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.
Psalm 24.8*

Throughout the Old Testament we find the records of many different battles fought by the Lord's people. From the first battle in Genesis 14, where Abraham and 318 of his servants fought against the coalition of armies that had captured his nephew Lot, to the final battles during the Babylonian sieges, we find many different situations where the people of God find themselves engaged in warfare.

The New Testament also contains some battle accounts. We studied them on Wednesday nights as we went through the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

But beyond that, the New Testament often uses warfare as an analogy for our life as Christians here on the earth.

Philippians 2, 2 Timothy 2, Philemon, Luke 11, Romans 13, 2 Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 6 all use battle elements to teach us something about our experience and our life in this world.

Now, the conquest of Canaan is somewhat of a hot issue these days. Many people outside the Church, and even some inside, especially among the Emergent Church movement, find the conquest unsettling or even grounds for rejecting portions of the Scriptures, in favor of a more politically correct Gospel.

Our purpose over the next few weeks is not to debate the why's of the Canaanite conquest. Though war is always terrible, we know that it was commanded of God's people by the Lord in the Old Testament. To us it is sufficient to know that our God is a God of love, a God of mercy, a God who gives ample opportunity for repentance and forgiveness. He is the God who spared Cain, the God who spared Rahab, the God who spared the thief on the cross, the God who will save anyone who is willing to come to Him.

So, again, our purpose isn't to argue why God commanded the bloody conquest of Canaan, or any of the other conflicts we find in His word.

Instead, we want to look at a few key battles and see what we can learn as disciples from how the Lord directed, how His people acted, and what was accomplished.

Because, when we look at these different battlefields, we find amazing differences in how God lead, what the people did and how the fight was won.

We want to take these passages and extract the spiritual principles which will show us how we are to prepare ourselves for the opposition we will face out in the world.

The first battle we want to analyze is, perhaps, the most famous in all the Bible: the Battle at Jericho.

Our passage is in Joshua chapter 6, and here we will discover that a key to victory in our lives is: **discipline**.

First some quick facts about Jericho to set the stage for this epic battle.

Though not very large, the 9 acre city of Jericho was a prominent feature in Canaan. Archaeologists believe that it is one of the oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world. Sitting below sea level and around 6 miles from the Jordan river, Jericho would have been amazing to behold with its series of walls and gates. One ancient Jewish source states that its gates were of iron and its bars of brass.¹

It was the first stop for the Children of Israel upon entering the Promised Land.

In Joshua 6 verse 1 we read:

Joshua 6.1 - Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

Now, we know this story. In fact, it's one of the passages of the Bible that we are very familiar with. So we're going to forego some of the more obvious elements that we've talked about before and hopefully get a slightly different look at a few of these verses.

What I want for us to do is to put ourselves in the place of one of the Israeli soldiers at this battle. I want us to think about what it would've been like in this conflict, because, in this battle, we will discover how important **discipline** is to our victory in the Christian life.

The city was shut up, inside and out. The people of Jericho knew the Israelites were coming and they got busy fortifying their defenses. The villagers and country dwellers who lived around the city would have fled inside the walls for protection. At the point of the battle there would have been several thousand people inside, confident in their security and defiant against the invading army.

Just about every battle movie ever made has the obligatory scene where delegates from each army meet in the middle of the battlefield to discuss terms. As viewers we know that there will be no satisfactory agreement or truce, and, most of the time at least 1 person gets impaled or bludgeoned in some way, sealing the deal, as it were.

But in Jericho they had no interest in truces, they had no interest in delegations or terms of surrender. They were simply closed up.

We must pause to remind ourselves that our spiritual adversaries, whether the Devil, the fallen world, or our own sin nature, they are not interested in surrender. They are not interested in delegations or diplomacy. They are in it to win it and they will not yield to us out of the kindness of their proverbial

¹ *The Targum*

hearts. Our enemies are determined and they are set in battle array against us. And they *will* destroy our lives if we let them.

Don't kid yourself into thinking that we can peacefully coexist with these adversaries. They are not looking to coexist with you, but to conquer you.

Joshua 6.2 - And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor."

I love this. The LORD is talking to Joshua and He points over to the city and says, "See?" What would Joshua have seen with his human eyes?

I stole this from a study my dad gave on this chapter, but listen to a quote from Bible commentator Leon Wood gives us some insight into Joshua's sight:

The walls were of a type that made direct assault practically impossible. An approaching enemy first encountered a stone abutment, eleven feet high, back and up from which sloped a plastered scarp [a line of jagged cliffs] reaching to the main wall some 35 feet vertical above. The steep, smooth slope prohibited battering the wall by any effective device or building fires to break it. An army trying to storm the wall found difficulty in climbing the slope, and ladders to scale it could find no satisfactory footing.

Jericho was an impenetrable fortress. It was a perfectly situated city. *It could not be taken at the time of this battle!*

It had an 11 foot high retaining wall at the base of the Tel. 35 feet up from that it had 2 defensive walls, one 6 feet thick and one 12 feet thick, spaced 15 feet apart. This city could not be conquered from outside.

And Jesus, appearing as a Theophany in this chapter, amazingly says, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand."

But here's what we need to understand and apply: Jesus isn't concerned with our enemies strength. Death is overcome. Sin and temptation are overcome. Doubt is overcome. And they are delivered into our hands by our victorious Savior, Jesus Christ, who has won the war for us.

Joshua 6.3-5 - [Jesus said] "You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

Very specific, very unusual directions from the Commander of the Army of the Lord. Of course, a common theme to all our battle studies is the necessity of faith. It's a reminder that we are called to be men of faith, walking by faith, even if the methods of God's calling seem unusual or impractical.

But here we see that the men of war were to gird and arm themselves and then to march around the city with the ark between a front and rear guard.

One insight we should draw here is that we must discipline ourselves to keep God's Word and power at the center of our lives. I think sometimes we go out to the battlefield and forget to bring God with us. It's like when the people said they didn't want to go into the Promised Land but then, when Moses said "ok, then you're all going to die in the wilderness," they changed their minds. They engaged in battle, but God wasn't with them, and they were defeated.

Here at Jericho, the ark of God was at the center of the army.

Keeping God central to our habits and thoughts and attitudes is a discipline. We have to work on it. We have to force ourselves to make time and control our thoughts and devote ourselves to Him, but, as we see here, the centrality of Jesus is essential for spiritual victory.

Joshua 6.6-7 - So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord. And he said to the people, Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the Lord.

Here we again pause to consider that the soldiers were to be armed. Though the battle was to be delayed by 7 days, each day the men were to rise, arm themselves and prepare for battle.

Yes, the conquest of the city was going to be in 7 days, but God didn't specifically say that there wouldn't be any kerfuffles in the mean time. Now, from the text we see that days 1 through 6 were pretty uneventful, but the point is that we have to discipline ourselves every day and expect conflict and trial to come.

Temptation is coming for you. Discouragement is coming for you. Trial and tribulation are coming for you. Are you armed and prepared to meet them? We must discipline ourselves to be ready for the fiery darts of the enemy, never letting down our guard, never failing to take up our defenses, never forgetting that we are engaged in warfare, even if the major battle is still up the road.

Joshua 6.8-14 - And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the Lord following them. The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.

But Joshua commanded the people, You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout. So he caused the ark of the Lord to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp.

Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets blew continually. And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

Some amazing displays of discipline here.

First, we see their silence. For 6 days as they marched in ranks around the city they were to be silent, no word coming out of their mouth. That takes a great deal of discipline.

To me it speaks of a few things. Focus. Unity. Anticipation. But most of all it reminds me of James 3 verse 4:

James 3.4 - The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

Men, we must discipline our tongues.

Ephesians 4.29 - Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

A good soldier disciplines his tongue. He controls his tongue. That's something we all need to recognize and submit ourselves under as we grow in our walk with the Lord.

There's a second discipline that I think is significant here, because, again, if we put ourselves into the mind of one of these soldiers, we realize that each time around the city we would see how insurmountable it was. Each time around we'd see how there was no weakness that we could overcome on our own. We'd see these massive walls and the powerful fortifications. This was a sealed city.

The discipline we must learn here is the reliance on the promises of God. I think sometimes as soldiers we take it upon ourselves to start climbing up the walls of Jericho or digging into the base of the city or scheming to figure a way out of our struggles and trials. But what we find here is that as we are in the thick of the battles of life, when we're face to face with our adversaries, when we see what we're up against, we must discipline ourselves to trust in the promises of God.

God has made you direct promises. Relying on them takes discipline. Trusting God to provide and protect takes discipline. Receiving God's peace over fear takes discipline. We are people who doubt and fear and worry. These are not to be part of our walk with God. We need to train ourselves to trust our Commander. To trust in His methods. To trust in His plan. No matter how insurmountable our enemy may seem at the time. Because God has given it into your hand.

Remember, we are to be of good cheer in the midst of our tribulations. We can only accomplish that when we are reliant on Jesus Christ, when we choose His battle plan over our own. It is a discipline that we must develop in our lives.

Joshua 6.15-16,20 - On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, Shout, for the Lord has given you the city. So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city.

The word for shouted there can be translated as 'to split the ears.' These men were prepared. The moment of truth had come, the moment of victory was before them and they were ready. They had

disciplined themselves and focused their hearts and minds. They had God at the center and each day repeated the steps that the Lord had laid out for them that they might walk in victory.

We know the result. The city was taken. The conquest of the Promised Land had begun.

This was a long battle prep for the army of Israel. And in this case we find that the key to victory was discipline.

We know the disciplines of the Christian faith. I think we sometimes forget what some of them are, but we know them because they are presented to us in the Word of God.

If we want victory in life, if we want the kind of life Jesus Christ has won for us and offered to us, then we must be disciplined. Every day in every way surrendering ourselves to Jesus Christ, who is the Lord, strong and mighty in battle.