

The Faith of Joshua

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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Text: Hebrews 11:24

Purpose: Joshua and the people of Israel demonstrated tremendous faith – they obeyed the word of the Lord, they focused upon God and the unseen, and declared it with a loud shout which led to victory! We can live victoriously if we exercise our faith in God.

In light of the many college football games going on this season of the year, I thought a football story would be appropriate today.

The senior quarterback, Brett, was playing his last game against the school's rival. The season would be considered a success if they beat them. The game came down to the last play, a touchdown would win it, if they failed, they would lose.



The quarterback looked around the huddle kind of misty eyed at his fellow senior players. He looked at his running back, Willy. He looked at his wide receiver, Danny. He told his team they would do play number 13.

Brett's teammates asked him to repeat it. Brett said, "13". They had practiced play thirteen numerous times and it had never worked. One of the team members questioned the quarterback.

Brett said, "We're going to do it anyway." Miraculously the play worked.

When Brett went to talk to his coach after the game, the coach inquired, "Why on earth did you call that play?"

Brett said he added up the uniform numbers of Danny, 7, and Willy, 8, which made thirteen.

"That's not 13!" the coach said, "That adds up to 15!"

To which Brett replied, "Well, coach, if I was as smart as you are, we'd never have won that game."¹

Today we turn our attention to Israel's defeat of the city of Jericho by an unusual strategy which made no sense when it comes to military warfare. But Joshua and Israel did exactly what God had ordered them to do.

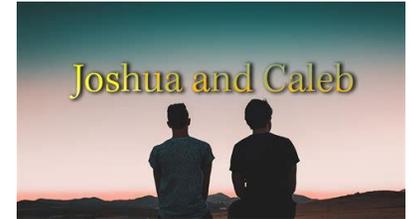
Over the past few months, we have been examining the heroes of the hall of fame found in Hebrews chapter eleven. Last week we looked at the faith of Moses as he led the people of Israel out of captivity, across the Red Sea and onward to the Promised Land. Moses had lived with the people of Egypt for forty years and then tried to set his people free by force. When that failed, Moses fled Egypt and went to the back side of the desert and lived there for another forty years. At the age of 80, God called Moses to go back and lead his people out of captivity.



What I didn't mention last week was that Moses never was able to bring the people into the Promised Land. Moses led the people across the sands of Sinai for the last forty years of his life.

When the people of Israel first left Egypt, they simply did not trust God enough to be able to enter into the Promised Land and conquer its inhabitants.

The results of their lack of faith led them to wander from place to place until every person that was above the age of 20, except Joshua and Caleb, had died and their bones were buried in the desert.



You see, Joshua and Caleb were the only two individuals that trusted God when they went into the Promised Land some 39 years earlier. As a reward, these two entered the land originally given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even Moses was not allowed to go there, but only looked at it from Mount Nebo, just before he died.

When Moses died, Joshua was selected to replace him and move the people across the Jordan River towards Jericho.

It was during the flooding season that Joshua gathered his people together and gave them instructions concerning crossing the Jordan River. The priests were to take the Ark of the Covenant and begin to walk into the water. Just as they did, the Jordan River stopped flowing and the water was held back, just like it occurred with the Red Sea almost 40 years earlier. I am sure the people of



Israel were amazed! They had seen the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day leading them in the wilderness. They had been fed by God with manna everyday for 40 years. They had seen the judgment of God time and time again due to the rebellion of their parents. Now the people were excited about a new thing that God was going to do in their midst.

We read in Joshua 5:13 that they were near the fortified city of Jericho. According to Deuteronomy 1:28, the walls of the city of Jericho “went up to heaven.” As Joshua was contemplating their next move, at twilight, a man came and stood near Joshua with a sword drawn.

Joshua asked this shadowy figure, “*Are you for us or are you for our adversary?*” The reply was, “*No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come.*” And Joshua fell on his face and began to worship Him. Then the Commander said to Joshua, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy. This was reminiscent of the encounter Moses had with God at the burning bush.

Joshua must have realized this was God in his presence. The Commander had His sword drawn ready to fight the battle for His chosen people. This would be the Lord’s battle, not the people of Israel.

Joshua 6:2-5 says this, “*And the Lord said to Joshua: ‘See! I have given Jericho into your hands, its king, and the mighty men of valor.*



You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall all go around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests, shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout: then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.”

Joshua heard the message of God and he communicated it to his people. Joshua acted in faith to what the Lord had told him. In Hebrews 11:1 it says, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” Joshua had seen time and time again as he served at the side of Moses, how God had done exactly as He promised. So, when He heard a clear word from God, He acted in obedience to the certain outcome God promised. He was certain that the walls would fall.

The faith that Joshua exercised with regards to the plan of God energized a whole nation to act in faith. It was contagious. You need to hear that no matter where you are in your life, whether it is working a regular 8 to 5 office job, working out in the field, or in a classroom, your faith influences and encourages others to have faith.

It is interesting in the account of Hebrews 11:30 that Joshua was not mentioned – it was the people of Israel that trusted God that enabled the walls of Jericho to fall. This was probably one of the greatest acts of faith that any group of people ever exhibited in the history of Israel. Their faith is an object lesson for us this morning.

The Obedience of Faith²

The Lord himself had given explicit instructions to Joshua that demanded exacting obedience. The instructions that the Lord had given him involved the order in which the people of Israel were to process and parade around the city of Jericho.

Soldiers were to march in the front of the procession. They were followed by seven priests blowing seven rams horns called shofars. Then the Ark of the Covenant proceeded in the middle of the procession. These were followed by the people and probably more soldiers bringing up the rear.



This order was important as well as how many times they marched around the city. During the first six days, they marched one time in silence around the city with the exception of the seven horns that blew. On the seventh day, they were to encircle the city seven times and after they completed that, they were all to stand and face the city and shout with a loud voice. The Lord promised the walls would fall – and the people of Israel believed God and did exactly what He instructed.



Absurdity

If you were to read any military manual on warfare, you will never find these kinds of tactics. This is absurd! Military history tells us that city walls were conquered by force.



Armies would pound the walls with stones. Walls were scaled with ladders and ropes. Gates were smashed with battering rams. Troops took the city by the sword. Cities do not fall at the sound of a ram's horn!

I am sure the soldiers on the inside of Jericho were howling with laughter at the ridiculous sight of the people of Israel marching around the city.

Belief

Even though it looked ridiculous in the sight of the world and the way the world says war should be fought, the people of Israel believed. Everything within them may have screamed how ridiculous this act of faith was, but they were obedient.

They saw the Jordan River dry up when the priest's feet touched the water carrying the Ark of the Covenant. They had seen the Lord feed the people with manna for 40 years. They had seen water come pouring out of a rock in the desert. They had seen the Lord send quail to feed the masses. If God could do all of that, they believed He could cause a city wall to fall. They were not pretending – they had real faith. They knew that God “was the rewarder of those that earnestly seek Him.”

Obedience

The evidence of their faith was demonstrated when they obeyed it.

I can see it now. Joshua issued orders to the people to organize them in a certain manner. The people rose in obedience and headed out on their pilgrimage around the city of Jericho. The trail of people began to get longer and

longer as they made their way silently around the city. Joshua was careful to keep the people out of the range of the archer's as they marched.

The strange parade continued for six long days. The people inside the city were alarmed and concerned. They had never seen an army act in this manner. But they had heard about these people of God. God had delivered the Egyptians into their hands at the Red Sea. They had heard how many of the enemies they confronted on the other side of the Jordan River had been defeated. But I am sure they simply laughed at the absurdity of it all.

You and I are called to live a life of obedience. We are called by God to put on a different kind of armor as we face our enemies in life.



1. We are called to put on the **belt of truth** and righteousness – the world scorns truth – especially God's truth.
2. We are told to put on a **breastplate of righteousness** – the world derides those that live good pure lives.
3. We are told to put on **shoes shod with the gospel** – and the world says our foot attire (the gospel of peace) is not welcomed in public places such as schools, courtrooms, or even legislatures.
4. We are told to put up our **shield of faith** – and all the skeptics can do is mock our faith in God with hollow substitutes of self-love and self-gratification.
5. We are told to put on the **helmet of salvation** – which is paid for by Christ – and the world can only use his name as a curse word.

6. We are told to use the **sword of God's word** – which has become more and more distant from our culture and communities.

The people of Jericho laughed at Israel's faith. The world today mocks believers who have dutifully armed themselves for warfare in today's world. Joshua led the people to victory – and you can lead your community to victory if you do as the Lord instructs. Failure to listen to the Lord would have resulted in defeat for Israel. Failure on our part to be obedient to God has resulted in defeat time and time again.

We all face Jericho's in our life. We can face them if we obey God's logic instead of the worlds.

- A man is filling out his income tax form and realizes that if he lists his extra hidden income, it will put him in a higher tax bracket and he will not have his money to pay his taxes. He is up against a dark wall. He has a choice to make – to do what is logical (just like everyone else) and not report this extra income – or will he do the absurdly truthful thing – trusting God to take care of him.
- A student is doing poorly in his class. He needs a B on this test in order to bring up his grades. As he is taking that final exam, he realizes that he will not make it. But he notices his neighbor is an A student and the test answers are clearly visible from where he is sitting. What would you do?



- You have been done wrong by another individual. But one day, you have the opportunity to get even with him and no one will ever know it was you. Many people would say that he had it coming to him, and you would agree. As you are thinking about doing this harm to him, you remember Jesus' words, "*Love your enemies, and pray for them.*" Will you set about to hurt them, or will you pray for them?



The bible gives us an illustration of a spiritual law: disobedience reveals unbelief, but obedience to God is evidence of our faith. When difficult days occur and hard decisions are faced – will you draw upon the ways of the world or will you be obedient to what God has instructed us to do? The authenticity of your belief will be tested and proven by your obedience.



The Focus of Faith

The centerpiece of Israel's faith was the Ark of the Covenant. It is representative of God's presence with the people of God. The ram's horns were symbolic of the presence of God among the people. The people believed God was in their midst. They had not left them or abandoned them. Sometimes we feel our world is void of God's hand and protection.

The people of Jericho only saw a ragtag group of people that had wandered in the desert way too long. They did not see the unseen God among them. But the people of Israel were confident in what was unseen.

A Declaration of Faith

It must have been difficult for the Israelites to be quiet those first six days. The walls of the city seemed to reach up to heaven. The soldiers surely mocked them every day as they silently proceeded around the city. The seventh day ended dramatically. After they went around the seventh time, the trumpets blasted, the people shouted, and then the wall fell and the people of Israel stormed the city and all the inhabitants were killed except Rahab the prostitute and all her family that was with her. She was spared because she hid the spies that were sent into Jericho.



That loud shout was the shout of faith. It was an outward expression of trust and obedience. Romans 10:10

says, "*For it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*" Job once said, "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him.*" What do your lips say about your faith in God?

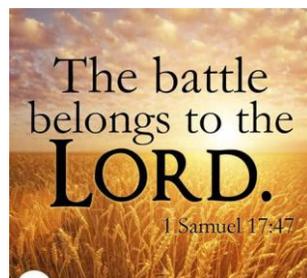
For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.
Romans 10:10



- True faith *obeys* God and his word, even when it seems absurd. It rejects the ways of the world and its armament and puts on the "ridiculous" armor of God. It marches confidently in a fool's army – to victory.

- True faith *focuses* upon God and sees the unseen. You become attuned to the things of God around you. You can begin to see with spiritual eyes the things of God.
- True faith *declares* itself to a fallen world.

Joshua's battle at Jericho is an example of faith that we can listen to and learn from. We are facing a battle every day. We are tempted to turn from God, and accept the ways of the world. Keep the faith – trust God – try God – and you will see the victory!



LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mikey's Funnies, September 10, 2008 – A QB Funny - forwarded by Pastor Tom

² Outline from R. Kent Hughes Commentary on Hebrews page 125-132