



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*God Brings Down Walls*

Joshua 6

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*series: Ventures in Faith: The Book of Joshua*

Last week was vision Sunday. We heard from our elders about several changes and transitions going on in our church. If you are a person who enjoys a little change once in a while, this is an exciting time for you. If you don't like change, grab the arm of someone sitting next to you and hang on for the ride! We are in this together.

God wants to grow us and is reminding us that the Christian life is not just about the destination that has been secured for us by Jesus Christ through his life, death, and resurrection. But the Christian life on earth is also about the journey—all those things we can learn along the way, life experience reminding us, in case we have forgotten, that we each have plenty of room to grow. God's desire for us is to keep chiseling us into a new image, the image of Christ. And it is a process. Life is a process to prepare us for eternity and along the way he gives us a bunch of people to affect through our actions with the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This past Monday a young lady from South Campus who works at Facebook invited Julie and me and her parents to visit the campus of Facebook. We had a wonderful time eating in their cafeteria until we were stuffed, walking it off by touring the campus, yet landing at an ice cream shop on their main street. I remember the term "Freshman 15." Now I understand the term, "Facebook 15." It was a great evening and it ended with Julie and me getting our pictures taken in front of the big Thumbs Up sign out front.

You can't miss the intentional look of the Facebook campus. As you walk through you see in the construction and design that everything looks unfinished. Ductwork is exposed. Girders, beams, conduit, temporary shelving, are all visible. I don't think my feet touched a piece of carpet. I learned from my host that the work culture at Facebook promotes the idea that the journey is never completed. There is always something new to create, learn, and improve, some new challenge, some new obstacle to overcome, or some wall that needs to come down.

When I thought about that, I certainly thought of the Christian life. But I also thought of us here at South Campus. This time of transition reminds us that we too are on a journey. We are under construction. What we look like today will not be what we look like next year. Our girders are showing. Our rooms are unfinished. There is plenty of room to create, learn and grow. There are challenges and obstacles to overcome. There are walls that need to come down. This reality should naturally move us to think more about the journey, while at the same time staying secure in the fact that our final destination in heaven is certain.

And the journey of the Israelites that we are seeing in Joshua should help us on **our** journey. Their journey began when they were set free from slavery in Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years with Moses at the helm. Then there is Joshua who led them across the Jordan River into the Land of Promise, and now they stand on the brink in a place called Gibeon just west of the Jordan River on the outskirts of a city named Jericho, ready to go into battle to make their first claim in the Promised Land.

They are a work in process; their girders are showing, their work is unfinished. Their final destination is defined because of a promise made by God, but the path they walk to get there remains nebulous. God has so much to teach them along the way. So much more unclear than clear, so much more God needs to do for them to experience the promise. Can you relate?

A few years ago I made a trip to Israel in July. One day we got on our tour bus in Jerusalem. Our destination was the ancient city of Jericho. We only traveled ten miles to the north and east of Jerusalem. Our road climbed up a hill east of Jerusalem called the Mount of Olives, a beautiful place with vineyards and olive trees, grass and settlements. And then down into what we call desert. The Bible refers to it as wilderness. It was truly God-forsaken. No trees, no green, just rocky, hilly, and hot. It was a short ride.

The typography changes dramatically and quickly in this small area known as the Promised Land. The ten-mile ride ended in a rocky parking lot. It was about 115 degrees when we got out of our air-conditioned bus. We looked up and on a hillside in the distance was a structure built into the side of a cliff. Our guide told us that this was the Monastery of the Temptation. We were walking on a rocky path where our Lord had walked in his 40 days of temptation. We rounded a bend and saw some uncovered ruins. They looked like walls and foundations for rooms. We were standing in what was left of the ancient city of Jericho, which was considered to be the oldest city on earth. Why would a city rise in the middle of this desolate arid piece of land 750 feet below sea level? Because Jericho was an oasis. It was well supplied with spring water. The word Jericho means fragrant. It was called by some the "city of palms."

It was not a large city in square feet. Before it was destroyed it was only 8 acres in size: 400 yards long and 200 yards wide. It sat upon a pear-shaped mound. A British archeologist, John Garstang, working in Jericho in the 1930's believed he had found evidence of the destruction. He found the foundations of two walls—an inner wall 12 feet thick and an outer wall about 6 feet thick. Jericho was a military outpost, very well defended. In fact when the spies entered the land 40 years earlier it was likely they

saw Jericho and became afraid. Their report back to Moses was, "But the people who lived there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large." No doubt the city was filled with great warriors and weapons and supplies. But these people in this city had heard about what God had done for this band of Jewish people. They were on lockdown.

**Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in (v. 1).**

The idea here is that the city had shut itself off. It had shut itself off from God and the Israelites. They no doubt were struck with fear and confusion when they heard that days earlier they had walked across the Jordan River on dry ground. Now how could this band of Israelites take this city? As Mark said last week, "It's like a Pop Warner football team taking on the Green Bay Packers." That's not exactly how he said it, but that is what he meant. The truth is, they didn't have the weapons, the number of soldiers, the advantage, and they would fail miserably without God.

I think I am seeing this more and more in my life. God puts us in positions where his plans are so big and so illogical from an earthly standpoint. He puts us in a position so that the only conclusion we can come to is that God must do it, we cannot. Look at what God tells them at this point of their unfinished journey. What he tells them seems so logically far-fetched.

**Then the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 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 the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in" (verses 2-5).**

An unconventional battle plan to say the least! In that day there was no gunpowder to blast holes in the walls. There was no catapult technology to hurl big rocks or rotting horse carcasses into the city. They could attack by trying to climb over the walls, but at the risk of huge numbers of casualties. Typically what an ancient army would do is lay siege to the city and starve the people out. But because the location of Jericho was an oasis, it made this strategy risky because inside they had plenty of food and water, and outside the desert was hot, dry and barren.

But walking around a city six times one time each day for six days? Then on the seventh day walk around seven times? How useful is that God? Maybe you have a situation at hand, one where you need the help of God to get through, and it seems like what you are doing is useless, like walking around a wall. You need to punch through the wall! But we need to understand there is great worth in the preparation. I know, you want the wall down today, but God is saying, embrace the journey, there is more at work than you think. Your faithful prayers are not in

vain. Your obedience will not be overlooked. Let go of convention and trust me. The battle belongs to me. Where I have you seems far-fetched but it isn't.

As we try to make sense of this battle plan some things start to make sense. First, the whole plan looks like some kind of a ceremony or worship service. There were daily movements around Jericho with the climax on the seventh day. Warriors, priests, and the Ark make up the movement. Trumpets are blown as a call to worship and a call to action, and people shout in response.

Having warriors tells us that it will be a military action. They lead and follow the Ark. And the Ark symbolizes the presence of God on the journey to lead them and protect them. God is at the center. The loud shout is a shout of victory commonly used in battle to intimidate one's enemy. The walking around the city for seven days showed the inhabitants of Jericho that they were serious. It was strategic. The people inside would watch this every day and be so afraid, they couldn't fight back. The army and priests on the outside would know very well that they had no part in bringing the walls down. When the time comes and the walls fall down, everyone marching around the city would know without a doubt that it was an act of God.

One commentator I read said it also showed God's mercy because in that seven days was plenty of time for them to surrender and turn to God. So what seems far-fetched actually wasn't. Another observation: God brings down walls even when our obedience seems like foolishness.

**So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord."**

When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them. The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets kept sounding. So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days (verses 6-14).

Let me stop right here. Sometimes we worry and fret that our actions contribute nothing of value. How many of us have sat with a sick friend or relative and felt useless? We can't make them well. We can't take their pain away. How many of us have tried to counsel a child, a relative, a friend who is making bad choices? We can't stop their choices. This passage is a good reminder that God is doing things behind the scenes. We focus on what we see as the important thing, but God is focused on many things, things we may not understand or even know about. Like God healing someone's spirit, like God strengthening someone's faith in a time of crisis. Like God letting someone hit bottom until a crisis of belief happens and leads to repentance.

Remember, God didn't come into our lives to make all the bad stuff go away, and if the bad stuff doesn't go away it doesn't mean God isn't working in your life. God is a God of relationships. Our relationship with God comes first, everything else second—my finances, my health, my work, my family—all second. God cares about my faithful obedience because it makes me stronger. That's health and wealth to God.

God doesn't allow them to take the city on the first day because he is using this time to increase their faith. And God drives home the point that following God is a journey that doesn't always make sense, but it leads people to greater faith in God. How do we know this took great faith for Israel? The book of Hebrews tells us this: *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient"* (Heb. 11:30-31).

Our faith grows when we recognize that we are still under construction, not completed. Our faith grows when we accept new challenges and trust God to come through. Joshua and his people had faith and believed in God because they knew God was right there with them. The Ark is mentioned eight times in this chapter. In the middle of each processional, the Ark was there. This great promise we have that God is with us comes right out of Joshua. The fight we are in is **God's** fight, not **our** fight. God is the hero of all our stories. Seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days of marching, seven times around the city, on the seventh day. Seven represents completeness or perfection. It comes from the root word "Shevah" in Hebrew means full and satisfied.

Notice in Joshua 6 verse 10 they marched in absolute silence. No singing, no chatting, no checking Facebook, not a word. They experience patience as they walk. They experience self-control, they experience a building of faith each day. What leads the people as they go out in silence? The Ark of the Covenant is the symbol that God is leading them and the symbol of God's presence among them. For six consecutive days they gather their stuff, and they walk in silence with God. FB Meyer calls "Silence!" the hardest of all commandments. "It is only the still heart that can reflect the heart of God's overarching care, or detect the least whisper of his voice through its quiet atmosphere, or know his full grace and power."

**On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same**

**manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.**

**But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury" (verses 15-19).**

God's orders may seem far-fetched, and following them may seem like foolishness, but when God's orders are followed walls fall down.

**When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys (verses 20-21).**

On that day when God caused the walls to fall down, Joshua gave the soldiers four instructions to obey after they had taken the city: 1) devote the entire city to God; 2) rescue Rahab and her entire family; 3) destroy every living thing in the city; and 4) burn the city. It's at this point that we ask, What? Why? I was getting so inspired and now all this death and instruction of men, women and children and animals. If I looked up genocide in the dictionary wouldn't a picture of Joshua and Jericho come up? This is why we brought out Josh Butler last month to teach us about this passage and many others where entire cities are destroyed by God. I would encourage all of you to go to our website and you can listen to Josh's message on violence and genocide in the Bible.

Let me touch on a few things here. First, all of Jericho was to be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Deuteronomy 20 gives very specific instructions on going to war. For cities outside the Promised Land, they were to be treated differently. Verse 10 says, *"When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace."* But later in verses 16-18 it says, *"However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God."*

Why the total destruction of cities in the Promised Land? God wanted to protect his people from idolatry and walking away from him. God did not want his people to be contaminated with the terrible practices of the Canaanites who practiced sex worship, temple prostitution, incest, divination, and even human sacrifice.



What we see in Jericho is a special case of divine judgment, not ethnic cleansing but religious purification. Judgment is always God's final resort. David Howard says this, "We should note that the instructions to Israel to annihilate the Canaanites were specific in time, intent, and geography, that is, Israel was not given a blanket permission to do the same to any peoples they encountered, at any time or in any place. It was limited to the crucial time when Israel was just establishing itself as a theocracy under God to protect Israel's worship, as well as to punish these specific peoples." As we get to the end of this chapter, not only do we see a God of justice, but also a God of mercy.

**Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her." So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.**

**Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord's house. But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.**

**At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: "Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:**

**"At the cost of his firstborn son  
he will lay its foundations;  
at the cost of his youngest  
he will set up its gates."**

**So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land (verses 22-27).**

On March 1, 1854 a wide-eyed 21-year-old young man set foot in Shanghai, China after a rough five-month sea voyage from London. Hudson Taylor faced poverty, cold, and death threats as he began his ministry to the Chinese people. In his 50 years in China, Taylor led the largest Christian evangelistic movement since the Apostle Paul.

The China Inland Mission (now OMF International) was ultimately responsible for bringing more than 800 missionaries to China. The ministry began 125 schools that directly resulted in some 18,000 Christian conversions, as well as more than 300 stations of work with more than 500 national helpers in all 18 provinces of China. If Hudson Taylor were evaluated by his life, mission work, and

legacy, he would easily be declared a huge success. His fame had spread. Many of us have heard of Hudson Taylor.

Yet the most remarkable part of Taylor's life was not the thousands he baptized but the hours he spent alone in his room, in prayer. Hudson Taylor's secret of relying on God no matter what the circumstances is as powerful and true today as it was over a century ago. In a meeting with a small group of missionaries in China, Taylor reminded them that there were three ways to do God's work: 1) to make the best plans we can and hope they succeed; 2) to make our own plans and ask God to bless them; or 3) obedience—ask God for his plans and then do what he tells us to do. And Hudson Taylor's fame spread because he was obedient. Taylor said: "Do not have your concert first, and then tune your instrument afterwards. Begin the day with the word of God and prayer and get first of all in harmony with Him." That's how we fight battles and see walls come down.

The battle belongs to God. The Apostle Paul says, "*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds*" (2 Cor. 10:4.) It's God's power that brings victories in the journey. What is a stronghold? It is anything that stands in the way of honoring God, anything in our own life or anything that goes up against God. God's power is unleashed to demolish strongholds when we pray and when we proclaim the word. God's spirit breaks down walls when his followers are faithful and obedient to his word while on the journey.

Hudson Taylor would have told us that his life was an unfinished journey. There was always more to create, learn and build. And it's in the struggle of the battle that we learn the most. In battle, even God's battle, we get wounded. In fact, I want to challenge each of us this morning—stay in the battle. Don't abandon the journey; we learn so much and grow so much while on it together.

As we move into communion together, I was thinking this week about what Christ did for us. "*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*" (Phil. 2:8). He saw us worth being wounded for. He obediently went into battle for us and he bears the wounds forever. It defies human logic to think that God would love us so much that he would leave his place of glory and come to earth and break down walls to win the victory for us.

Then I imagined God asking me about my battles on earth. "Do I have any wounds?" What if I said to God, "I don't have any wounds." Would God think, "What? Was there nothing to fight for? No new ground to take, no stronghold to break, no wall to come down? No part to be chiseled away?" God has us part of something big that is changing us personally and as a church. And along the way there is plenty of room to grow in faith and obedience and see first-hand walls fall down.

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*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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