



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 five decades 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. 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 lived relying on God no matter what the circumstances.

In a meeting with a small group of missionaries in China, Hudson 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; and 3) to ask God for His plans and then do what He tells us to do. I don't know about you, but I tend to do #1 and #2 a lot! At the start of chapter six, we find Joshua in front of yet another obstacle: the city of Jericho. What was he going to do? Which of Hudson Taylor's three choices would he make? Let's begin the story in verses 1-7.

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

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."

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."

The Fall of Jericho

The land of Canaan was divided up into several city/states, each ruled by a king. The cities were not very big in size but were all built like fortresses. Jericho was only about 8 acres in size. It was roughly 400 yards long, 200 yards wide, and 70 yards high. It was a military base and sat on top of a small hill. British archaeologist John Garstang, working at Jericho from 1930-36, believed he found evidence of Joshua's destruction of the city. He found two walls. An inner wall about 12 feet thick and an outer wall, about 6 feet thick. The walls were separated by about 15 feet. While archaeologists don't all agree with these findings, there's no dispute, Jericho was a strategic military outpost and fortress of a city, not an innocent little village. Remember, it was the sight of Jericho that convinced ten Jewish spies that Israel could never conquer the promised land. Reporting back to Moses they said, *"But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there"* (Num. 13:28). Inside the city, no doubt, was filled with great warriors and an arsenal of weapons and supplies.

After hearing about the Jewish people and their God, after seeing the miraculous parting of the Jordan River, the residents of Jericho, in fear, locked themselves away in the security of their own city. What can Israel possibly do to take this city? Absolutely nothing. If they rely on their own strength and wisdom, they will fail miserably. They are no match. The entire emphasis and point of this story is God's presence and power. Joshua didn't fight the battle of Jericho, God did. And so God speaks to Joshua and outlines his plan.

God's Instructions to Joshua

Before God tells Joshua the plan, he says, "I have delivered Jericho into your hands..." God says, "This is my fight and I don't lose." God gives Joshua a great encouragement in the form of a promise: the victory has already been won! Israel fights **from** victory, not just **for** victory (Wiersbe). The Israelites are finally in the promised land and now they by faith must take it. The same is true for followers of Jesus. We fight from victory, not for it. Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sin, Satan and death have all been defeated. So the next time the devil reminds you of your past, remind him of his future! He's

been defeated! And the day is coming when Jesus returns and Satan is thrown into the abyss.

After reminding Joshua of the outcome, God outlines his plan. Typically, to overtake a city, an army would build siege ramps to get to the top of the walls. Or they would cut off the food and water supplies going into the city and starve them into submission. As a great military general, you bet Joshua was wondering what tactic they would use. Instead God says, "I have another idea: line up some of your armed soldiers up front, then put a seven-piece horn section behind them, the Levites with the ark behind them, and then a rear guard with more armed soldiers. Once they are in formation, march around the city one time, every day, for six days in complete silence, only with the occasional blowing of the ram horns. Then on the seventh day, march around the city seven times and when Joshua gives the word, everyone shout as loud as you can and the walls will fall."

Do I really have to tell you how insane and foolish this plan was? This would be like God's people going into the Vietnam War with squirt guns. High walls don't come crashing down at the noise of trampling feet. Cities are not won by the noise of trumpets either. And this was all done in silence.

What's the point of this foolish plan and why does God make Israel do all this? Several reasons. First, when all was said and done, there would be no doubt God did it. That God fought and won the battle of Jericho, not Joshua or Israel. God loves to use the foolish and weak things of this world to overcome the powerful and the abuse of power in the world. Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians about this and said, *"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him"* (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

I see this principle in my life all the time. After graduating with a business degree at the height of the dot com boom, I moved to Las Vegas to plant a new church instead of working for a startup, and people didn't get it. Then after leading a thriving ministry in Las Vegas, my wife and I knew it was time to leave and we moved to LA to finish seminary. Then as graduation approached, we hoped to move to Portland and plant a new church there, but God said, nope, you guys are coming back to the Bay Area with CPC, because that's where all young pastors with families want to go! Then you'll move from San Mateo to Millbrae before starting a new campus of CPC there. Then, God called us to foster adopt our son Brenden because two kids were easy and we had spare time! Then we sensed God calling us to move to San Francisco because it was the next logical thing to do! And now, here we are, in 12 months, we're going to plant a new church from CPC with 1000 people. As my wife and I look back on our

lives, all we can say is, "Only God can do that!" Don't we all want to live in a way of complete reliance on God?

The other reason why God wanted his people to obey his plan was to test their faith and patience. God could have brought Jericho to its knees much sooner. He created the entire universe in six days! But, God is never in a hurry. And for six days nothing happened. The people marched around the city and went back to their camp and waited, only to do it again. The book of Hebrews tells us, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days"* (Heb. 11:30). The enemy was overcome by faith. And the only thing that grows our faith is to accept new challenges and trust God to come through.

Joshua and his people had faith and believed God because he was right there with them. The ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence and power, is mentioned eight times in this chapter. Even at the center of the procession around the wall, the ark was right there. The great promise of the book of Joshua—we've said this every week—is God with us. This was God's fight, not Joshua's. God is the hero of the story. The destruction of Jericho is done by God and for God. There really wasn't even a battle to fight. Look how the story unfolds in verses 8–21:

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.

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."

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.

The Unfolding of Events

This week, I wondered how the people in the city responded to this daily procession around the city. I think on the first day they were frightened and expected the typical siege. Can you imagine the relief they felt after all Israel did was walk around the walls in silence? I bet by the second day, they started mocking Israel. "How ya'll going to get in?!" "Ohhh, your walking is so scary!" "Oh man, those trumpets are sending shivers down our spine!"

Then the seventh day came. On that day, 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 we come to the end of all the inspirational and encouraging passages in Joshua. Chapters 6-12 present some of the most controversial material in the entire Bible. This is why we brought out Josh Butler 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 listen to Josh's message on violence and genocide in the Bible.

For now, let me touch on a few things here. First, all of Jericho was to be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Typically, soldiers shared the spoils of war with each other, but not in this case. In fact, this command was not a new one, nor was it always the practice. Deuteronomy 20 gives very specific instructions when going to war. For cities outside the promised land, they were to be treated differently, "*When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace*" (v. 10). But later 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—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—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*" (verses 16-18). God wanted to protect his people from idolatry and walking away from him. God did not want his people to be contaminated with the detestable practices of the Canaanites who practiced sex worship, temple

prostitution, incest, divination, and even human sacrifice. Do you really want your God to tolerate that kind of evil?

What we see in Jericho is a special case of divine judgement, 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).

The God of Justice and Mercy

Two things I want you to see here. First, God has been incredibly patient and merciful with the Canaanites. The Canaanites had been given 400 years to repent and come to God, but they didn't. They constantly antagonized and fought the people of God for centuries. Jericho had six days to change their minds and leave the city, but they didn't. It reminds me a little of Jonah. Jonah goes to the great and evil city of Nineveh and preaches about the coming judgment of God. And what happens? The people respond to God's message, repent, and come to God. The exact opposite happened in Jericho. The Canaanites, like all people,

had the opportunity to humble themselves and turn to God, but they didn't.

Another way we see God's mercy in this passage is the saving of Rahab and her family. By grace Rahab and her entire extended family were spared from destruction just as God promised. Even though she was a Gentile, she came to faith in God and was graciously spared from destruction. If you went on ancestry.com and traced Rahab's lineage, many generations later Jesus Christ would be born from her bloodline. Incredible. So, what we see here is how God is holy and will not tolerate sin. But, God is loving so he sent Joshua to lead his people into freedom. Ultimately God would send his son Jesus, the new Joshua, to deal finally and fully with the problem of sin.

Why does God often place his people in what appears to be impossible and unwinnable situations? He does it to place us in a position to see, in the words of Hudson Taylor: God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's supplies. God tells Noah to build an ark even though it had never yet rained on the earth before and nothing like an ark had ever been built. God commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son, even though God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. How would God come through on that promise? Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, put in Potiphar's house, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and then gets thrown into jail. How would God save his people from the famine? All of Israel is scared of

a giant named Goliath, but a little shepherd boy named David takes his slingshot and five smooth stones to the battlefield. Israel wandered for 40 years in the desert because of their own sin and disobedience. Moses dies, there's the flooded Jordan River to cross and the city of Jericho to capture beyond that. In every single case we see the same principle—God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's supplies.

If you are a follower of Jesus we need to search out, listen to, accept and adopt God's strategies for victory revealed in the Word of God. And guess what, they all seem foolish. They all appear like "unorthodox" fighting methods in the eyes of the world today—love your enemies, don't worry but pray, meditate on the Word of God, don't forsake the fellowship of believers (aka go to church), confess your sins to one another, eat from the bread of life and drink from his blood (communion), praise his name even when you don't feel like it. Those are God's plans for victory. Every day we have a choice to do things our way or God's.

If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, this is a stark and scary passage for you. Jericho is a picture of what will happen to you on the day of judgment. If you have shut your heart against God, if you have refused to come to Jesus, you will be eternally separated from God. My hope and prayer is that you would be like Rahab. Today, would you trust in Jesus Christ and follow him?

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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