



Let me start today with a question. Who was your favorite superhero when you were a kid? Captain America? Thor? Iron Man? Wonder Woman? Superman? Spiderman? Batman? A lot of this depends on your age. Mine is Batman. Maybe that's because I grew up with Batman. I even recall the first TV episode of *Batman* in the 60's. But the storyline was always the same: after witnessing the murder of his parents as a child, young Bruce Wayne dedicates his life to protecting the citizens of Gotham City from criminals.

But do you know what sets Batman apart from others? Unlike most heroes, he has no special powers. He's just a normal guy, like you and me. He has a Bat-mobile and a cool computer in the Bat-cave, but he's able to conquer the likes of the Joker and the Riddler just as a normal guy with a cool costume.

Today we come to Joshua chapters 11 and 12. In these chapters Joshua is described in almost a superhero-type fashion. But, like Batman, he has no special powers; he's an ordinary guy just like you and me, but his heroism is unquestionable. I want us to see today what makes a man or a woman heroic, what will make us victorious in the battle against the forces aligned against us as followers of Jesus. Let me start by offering a little background. The book of Joshua can be divided into three major sections:

- In chapters 1-12 Israel conquers the land God had promised them from ages past.
- In chapters 13-21 Israel divides the land among the twelve tribes.
- In chapters 22-24 Israel settles the land.

Today we're finishing the first major section that deals with the conquest of the land. In this conquest there are three phases:

- There's the preparation and the initial crossing of the Jordan River, followed by a push from Jericho to Ai, driving a wedge into the very heart of Canaan.
- The second phase was conquering the area south of the wedge. We saw that last week as Israel conquered many strong cities but also made a treaty with Gibeon.
- The last phase was to take the northern region. This is described in chapter 11 and then chapter 12 follows with a summary of the entire invasion, including a list of all the defeated kings.

Remember this whole conquest is a picture for us of our life in Christ. The key is given to us in the NT: *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us"* (1 Cor. 10:11). What Israel went through is an example we can apply to our own journey of faith. In our spiritual lives, we're

called to take new land as well, relying on the promises of God. When the conquest of Canaan was complete, Israel experienced "rest" from war and received their inheritance. Well, there's rest and an inheritance for us as well.

So what do chapters 11-12 teach us about what superhero-kind of greatness looks like on this journey?

### A Battle to Fight

The first thing is we must have a battle to fight.

**When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Akshaph, and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah south of Kinnereth, in the western foothills and in Naphtoth Dor on the west; to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah. They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel (verses 1-5).**

Jabin, King of Hazor, was leader of the northern coalition. He was alarmed by Israel's victories in the South, so he called the kings of the North together to join forces near the waters of Merom, a little lake just north of the Sea of Galilee.

The new element in this battle was the use of horses and chariots. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote the combined forces of these Canaanites numbered 300,000 foot soldiers, 100,000 cavalry, and 20,000 chariots. So this will be the hardest battle yet for Joshua. As far as we know, Israel had never fought against chariots before. What's clear is Israel didn't have a chance on their own. The odds against them are overwhelming. Do you ever feel like that? This past week I tried to track all the conversations I had with people and catalogue the various battles people are fighting.

- A man's daughter is dealing with the aftermath of abuse.
- There's unresolved conflict on a church staff.
- A couple grieves over the loss of a daughter to cancer.
- A pastor deals with a barrage of emails from someone who thinks his teaching is heresy.
- One man is fighting pornography, another alcoholism.
- There's someone involved in an extramarital affair.
- There's a man battling debilitating depression.

These are the battles we fight, and they often feel insurmountable. What I want you to see is this is an essential part of the

process of becoming the person God intended us to be. You can't become a great man or woman of God without a battle to fight. It's in the battle we're tested and proven.

Palmer Chinchin shares a story about a time when he and his brothers went white-water rafting down the dangerous Zambezi River in Africa. Their guide gave these instructions: "When the raft flips, stay in the rough water. You will be tempted to swim toward the stagnant water at the edge of the banks. Don't do it. Because it is in the stagnant water that the crocs wait for you. They're large and hungry."

It's our natural human tendency to swim away from the rough water towards the banks, but that leads to destruction. It would have seemed easier to the Israelites to make peace with the Canaanites, but that would lead to compromising God's standards. If we're going to be strong in following Jesus it will mean a more difficult life in the rough water; it will mean standing against the tide of the world around us.

## A Promise to Believe

How do you think you'd have responded to all this if you were Joshua? Listen again to what he faced: "They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore." Josephus writes, "The host of enemies dismayed both Joshua himself and the Israelites, and in the excess of their fear they scarce hoped for success." Have you been there? It's like you know you **don't** have what it takes to deal with this. In your fear, you scarce hope for success. But God knows what you're dealing with, and he knows how you feel. If you're listening, God will bring a word of encouragement to you. This is what he did for Joshua. Listen to what he says in verse 6:

**The Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."**

God would have never said, "Do not be afraid of them" if Joshua wasn't really afraid. But he addresses Joshua's fear and gives him a promise to believe. "By this time tomorrow I will hand them all of them, slain, over to Israel." God promises victory in 24 hours. God is completely sovereign over the very thing you fear. There's nothing going on in your life he doesn't know about and can't overcome.

In the old classic book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan describes Christian's approach to the Palace Beautiful where he hoped to lodge. He walked down a narrow passage to get there and he saw two lions standing in the way. Obviously, he stopped and was terrified. Then, parenthetically, Bunyan writes, "The lions were chained, but he saw not the chains." That's how it is with us. The things we fear are chained by God, but we can't always see that. Paul, who'd faced many lions in his life, said Jesus sits at the Father's right hand "**far above all rule and authority**" and has "**all things under his feet**" (Eph. 1:21-22). That means though we don't see the chains, every power that might destroy us in his control.

## A Command to Obey

### Obedience requires action

One of the things fear can do is paralyze us from acting. President Franklin Roosevelt declared, "Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

But paralysis wasn't an option for Joshua nor was passivity. God says, "You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots." They'd have to get their hands dirty to do that. There wouldn't be any walls falling down or giant hailstones bombing the enemy as before. They'd have to fight. You see, the antidote to fear is faith expressed in action. It's when we take action steps of faith we realize the Lord is powerful and faithful.

### Obedience requires faith

Notice also obedience can be hard because it doesn't make a lot of sense. Why did God command Joshua to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots? Hamstringing a horse made the animal useless because you cut the large tendon at the back of the knee on the hind legs. And a burned-up chariot isn't a lot of good either. The temptation would be great to confiscate those things and use them to gain a military advantage. But God wants Israel to trust him, not their weapons. Years later, another superhero, King David who slew Goliath with just a few stones, wrote, "**Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God**" (Ps 20:7). And that's exactly what Joshua and the Israelites did.

**So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. Joshua did to them as the Lord had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots (verses 7-9).**

Joshua launches a surprise attack the next day and they rout the enemy. They chase the Canaanites to the mountainous areas in the north and east. In their panic, the Canaanites run to the mountains where chariots and horses are useless and we're told "the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel."

And notice Joshua's obedience. "Joshua did to them as the Lord directed. He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots." We've seen this over and over in this book—obedience. Joshua didn't think he knew better than God. He didn't pick and choose which of God's commands he'd obey and which ones just weren't that big of a deal. Even though it didn't always make sense to him, he believed God and obeyed him.

Obedience is always tied to faith. Maybe you're a single person who'd love to fall in love and find a husband or wife. But if you decide to obey God and only consider marrying a believer, well, that narrows the field quite a bit. To obey God you'll have to trust God. Or maybe you're a married couple and you know the Lord wants you to give a generous portion of your income to his work. But it's hard for you to see how the math works. "Lord, if

we give this much we won't be able to do this or that." But God says, "Will you trust me in this?" Again, obedience is tied to faith.

### Obedience must be complete

Joshua understood this and we see him being obedient in the rest of this Northern campaign.

At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.) Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed, and he burned Hazor itself. Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned. The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed. As the Lord commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses (verses 10-15).

What a great testimony to Joshua—"he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses." Joshua's obedience is seen as he obeys God's command to completely destroy the enemy. Like everything else in Canaan, they were under the ban; devoted to God's wrath. Some of the cities that were particularly evil were burned, while others would later be settled in by the Israelites.

This is hard for some of us to swallow, but the bottom line is these people were wicked and violently opposed to God. If they weren't destroyed, they'd eventually destroy everything Israel was about. Back in Genesis 15:16 God told Abraham the sin of these Canaanites had to reach its full measure before Israel could occupy the land. And then in Leviticus God told Moses, *"Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants."* That's what was happening here in Joshua. The time of mercy and grace was past for them.

The idea of Israel "utterly destroying" the enemy reminds us in our fight against sin the enemy must be completely defeated. We can't leave a single pocket of resistance. But I think most of us know that doesn't happen overnight. We see that here as well.

In verses 16-22 we get kind of a wrap-up of the entire conquest. It starts out "So Joshua took this entire land." That doesn't mean there weren't any Canaanites left, but Israel had control. Then the writer describes the specific areas they took.

### Obedience requires persistence

Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses. At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. No Anakites

were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive (verses 18-22).

Notice those words, "Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time." This reminds me of the title of one of Eugene Peterson's books, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. That's the Christian life, isn't it? In fact, the conquest of Canaan took seven years in all.

Don't miss this. Our battle isn't quick and easy. Opposition doesn't just go away because we pray about it or win one skirmish. God's heroes are in it for the long haul. They have patience and persistence. These are fruits God produces in us through years of fighting battles, sometimes even learning the hard way through our failure as Joshua had at Ai.

The apostle Paul challenges us with the same perspective. In Col. 1:11 he prays that you'd be *"strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience."* He says in Gal. 6:9, *"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary."* There are many times when I lose heart and want to give up. I'm sure you feel the same way. One of the things that makes me want to give up is the character of the opposition. Verses 19 and 20 describe the hardness of heart of the Canaanites. For seven years they mounted tough resistance to God and his people, driven by an increasing hardness of heart. They were stubbornly opposed to everything Israel represented.

It clearly says God hardened the hearts of the Canaanites. This wasn't to keep them from repenting from their sin. We've already seen how Rahab was saved because she called out to the Lord in repentance. The writer also mentions the Gibeonites. Even though they were deceptive, they believed in the Lord, and they became a part of Israel's worship. The stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites demonstrate what Paul says in Romans 10:13, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* God didn't harden the Canaanites' hearts to keep them from repenting from sin. He hardened their hearts because they first hardened them themselves. Remember when God hardened Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites in Exodus? It says Pharaoh first hardened his own heart against God, and then God sealed the process, confirming what was already happening in Pharaoh's heart. Here God has been patient with the Canaanites for 650 years, as long as there was any hope of repentance. But their sin had reached its full measure, so judgment day has come. That was the only way God's larger saving purposes could be fulfilled. Remember: God wanted a holy people through whom the Messiah would come to bring salvation to the world.

Verses 21 and 22 mention the Anakim. They were a race of giants. This is the first mention of them in Joshua. Caleb will face them again later, as will David when he fights Goliath. Forty years earlier, the twelve spies went into the land of Canaan and saw these giants. Ten of the twelve were scared to death. The other two, Joshua and Caleb, said, "No big deal. The Lord will take care of them." It took more than forty years before the Lord fulfilled that confidence, but here we see God did in fact give Israel victory over these giants.

These giants represent our greatest, most dreadful fears. For many of us, that's death. The writer of the book of Hebrews referred to "those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." But God is greater than our greatest fear. God is greater than death. We know that because Jesus overcame death, and so will we.

## **A Goal to Achieve**

We've seen a superhero must have a battle to fight, a promise to believe, and a command to obey. The last thing is found in v. 23 and on into chapter 12.

**So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.**

Chapter 12 goes on and runs through all the land both east and west of the Jordan, as well as all the kings, thirty-one in all, they defeated. The goal for us to achieve is the obtaining of our inheritance and with that rest. This gift of rest is mentioned four more times in Joshua. Later in Joshua each tribe will receive their inheritance of land. For that to happen, Joshua led the nation of Israel into a kind of literal, physical rest from their enemies.

But in the NT the writer of Hebrews says there's a kind of rest Joshua couldn't lead the people into: *"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so no one will perish by following their example of disobedience"* (Heb. 4:8-11).

So this physical rest in the land of Canaan wasn't God's ultimate rest. There's a kind of rest only Jesus can give us. This rest is ultimately fulfilled in our eternal home in heaven, the city that's to come, which is the inheritance of all who trust in Jesus. At one level that's our future hope we haven't yet entered into, but at another level it's already ours through Christ. We've already received the down payment of our inheritance and in Christ we rest secure in his love and grace and acceptance. We rest in him because our work is through; there's nothing we can do to earn his acceptance.

What does this rest look like? I saw it in so many of the people I talked to this past week; those fighting battles I described earlier. I saw it in their relaxed confidence in God's goodness, faithfulness and provision. I saw it in their joy and hopeful optimism about the future. Despite tremendous challenges, they rested in the fact that the God who'd rescued them so often in the past could be trusted to do so again.

I heard a story this week which illustrates this idea of resting in Him. A missionary couple and their family were spending their

vacation at a cabin near a lake. They had three children—twelve, seven and four. One day the four-year-old slipped away, went out on the dock to play, and fell into the lake. He didn't know how to swim and he wasn't wearing a life jacket. The screams of the two older children alerted the father to the danger. He ran out on the dock and the kids pointed to where he'd fallen in. He dove into the lake. The water was only about ten feet deep, but it was so murky he couldn't see a thing. He went all the way to the bottom and felt around frantically for his little boy. Finally, he ran out of air, came to the top, took another huge gulp of air, and went down again. On his way down, his hand brushed his little boy's leg. He turned and found his son with his arms and legs calmly and firmly wrapped around one of the pilings, three feet below the water. The father pried him loose, carried him onto the lawn, and they both caught their breath. After a few minutes, when they'd calmed down, the dad asked, "Son, what were you doing down there, hanging on to that piling?" The little boy answered, "I was just waiting for you, Dad."

What a beautiful picture of resting, waiting for our Father, trusting in him to deliver us, fight for us and give us victory over the most daunting circumstances. That's our confident hope. And sometimes part of resting is remembering all God has done. That's what I love about chapter 12: it lists one after another the name of every king they defeated. Those verses seem tedious but they're really exciting because they recount the Lord's victories one by one. We should train ourselves to stop saying, "Lord, thank you for your many blessings," but to name them one by one, act by act.

What makes a man or a woman heroic? What will make us victorious in battle against various forces aligned against us? God's superheroes have a battle to fight, a promise to believe, a command to obey, and a goal to achieve. No doubt Joshua was one of the greatest, but the greatest of all by far is Jesus.

He had a battle to fight: Jesus fought against the powers of Hell and triumphed over them through the cross.

He had a promise to believe: The Father promised Jesus he'd sit on the throne of David and reign over a never-ending Kingdom.

He had a command to obey: Jesus said to the Father, "Here I am, I have come to do your will."

He had a goal to achieve: His goal was to bring many sons and daughters to glory.

With a superhero like that fighting on our behalf, how could we possibly lose?

*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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