

## Joshua 6 – Forward on a Limb

Do we have any football fans here this morning? Anyone for example support West Ham? How about Tottenham? Aston Villa? How about Manchester United? Well, to be honest, I don't know much about football so you're going to have to tell me, which teams would you say are the best teams? Give me your top five teams.

One team that will probably be on your list is Manchester United. They have been up with the big boys for quite a few years now. They're considered to be one of the strongest teams. A big budget, some great players, a good manager, and they've been playing at top level for years. Manchester United takes some beating. But on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2009, right at the start of the season, something happened. There was a shock result in the premier league as new comers, Burnley beat the experienced big boys, Manchester United 1-0. It shocked everyone because no one expected that Burnley had a chance against the mighty Manchester United.

Jericho was viewed a little bit like Manchester United. It was one of the oldest cities in the world. Built thousands of years before Joshua's time, it was considered indestructible. Part of that was down to the players they had on their team. For its day, Jericho was considered a very large city with a population to match. So they had a strong army. Kings and warriors are mentioned. But perhaps the most famous feature of this city and what undoubtedly prevented many from mounting an attack against it, was the stadium itself. The size and strength of its walls. In places the walls were 25 feet high and as much as 20ft thick. From the top of the city walls, soldiers would be able to see for miles around, so if an army did mount an attack, they would be spotted in ample time and then Jericho would simply shut its gates and fight from on top of the huge walls. Only the brave took on this mighty city.

The Israelites in comparison are a little like Burnley. Not really much of a stadium to boast about, they're still living in tents. That leaves them quite vulnerable compared to Jericho. And they're new to the field. I mean, they've only just made it across the Jordan, so this is a bit of an away game.

It is surprising then with all that power and strength that this chapter opens with a description of Jericho cowering in fear behind the walls with the gates shut and securely barred. No one allowed in or out. Obviously they are scared.

Just as Rahab had told the spies:

[Joshua 2:9-11](#)

["I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear](#)

because of you. <sup>10</sup> We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea <sup>[b]</sup> for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. <sup>[c]</sup> <sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

The people of Jericho recognised that the God of the Israelites was a powerful God. As Rahab said, they knew about the crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground.

- God is sovereign over nature
- *[Story of new Christian reading about the parting of the Red Sea]*

So most likely the people of Canaan saw God as a nature God or a water God, able to command the water of the Red Sea and of course, the Jordan which they had just witnessed pile up in a heap at Adam, allowing the Israelites to once again cross on dry ground.

They were probably a little more concerned to realise that he was also a war God, able to help the Israelites defeat Sihon and Og. This showed that God was not only sovereign over nature but also over people.

- *[Christian union at work being allowed a room in the office thanks to people in strategic places]*

This was looking like a fairly powerful God but every god has their limits. Jericho's hopes were that the God of the Israelites was not a fortress God, a God able to defeat a walled city.

So we see Jericho in defensive mode, locked inside the city behind the huge walls and gates, in an attempt to keep the Israelites shut out. Perhaps the narrator is indicating here that this is a reflection of the way that Jericho had shut God out. The walls presented another problem for the Israelites, another barrier to get through. But they had already been through several barriers. God had already opened up the barrier of the Red Sea for them and God had already opened the barrier of the Jordan. And actually we read at the beginning of this chapter that God had already delivered Jericho into Israel's hands. That doesn't mean that it had already happened, more that it was certain.

#### Joshua 6:2-5

<sup>2</sup> Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

What a confidence boost for Joshua. Then come the instructions of exactly how they are to defeat Jericho.

<sup>3</sup> March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."

They're strange instructions for an army going into battle aren't they. It's not the kind of briefing that you would expect an army officer to give the troops before going into battle. But there is good reason for these instructions.

The march around the city, is a strange practice. It feels like a ceremonial inspection of Jericho's defences. A similar idea is picked up in the Psalms:

Psalm 48:12-13

Walk about Zion, go around her,  
count her towers,

<sup>13</sup> consider well her ramparts,  
view her citadels,  
that you may tell of them to the next generation.

Walking around the city for a week would have given them a good look at the defences of Jericho. They would remember many details which could be passed down as they retold the story to their children and grandchildren.

As they marched around the city, the ark of the covenant went with them. The symbol of the presence of God with the Israelites, travelling with them as they prepared for battle. This time the ark is preceded by seven priests blowing trumpets. The trumpets also had a special significance and go back to God's instructions to Moses:

Numbers 10:9-10

<sup>9</sup> When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies. <sup>10</sup> Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals—you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, <sup>[a]</sup> and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the LORD your God."

They marched around the city for seven days in all. The number seven is significant in the bible and represents holiness. The number seven was significant to the Israelites. Marching round the city for seven days in silence would have no doubt reminded them of the seven days of consecration before Passover.

## Exodus 12:14-20

<sup>14</sup> "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD - a lasting ordinance. <sup>15</sup> For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.

All of these things reminded the Israelites that victory was from God. If you remember what we looked at in verse 2, God said to Joshua "I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men." Victory was a gift from God, they would defeat Jericho in God's strength, not their own.

Imagine what this must have looked like for the people of Jericho. An army armed ready for battle coming towards them. You can imagine the soldiers preparing themselves. Perhaps soldiers standing on top of the walls shouting down instructions to groups of soldiers waiting behind the gates. "Get ready men, the Israelites are coming armed and ready for battle... They're almost here, get ready... hang on a minute, they've just walked straight past." And as they walked back to their camp, the people of Jericho must have thought, "where are they going?" No swords drawn, no siege ramp set up, not even any shouting. How weird. It must have unnerved Jericho even further and they watched in confusion.

At our Thursday Night Youth Group we were looking at this a couple of weeks ago and the young people were asked to put themselves in the position of each of the groups we see here. So one group imagined being the Israelites, another group imagined being the citizens of Jericho and a third group imagined being the other Canaanites. There were some interesting things that came out of that. One of the group that imagined they were the Israelites said they were a bit fed up because they had been walking around for 40 years to get to the promised land and when they get there, they have to do more walking.

They march around the city once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. Making 13 times in all – unlucky for Jericho! After the seventh time around the priests give a blast on the trumpets and Joshua orders the people to shout. At that the walls of Jericho collapse.

<sup>20</sup> When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

What was thought to be an indestructible city, was destroyed in God's power. In Canaan this was considered impossible. But then our God is a God who specializes in the impossible.

Peter Larson said:

"The life of Jesus is bracketed by two impossibilities: a virgin's womb and

an empty tomb. Jesus entered our world through a door marked 'no entry' and left through a door marked 'no exit'."

God is sovereign over all things. Nothing can stand in his way.

Not Nature – God is sovereign over natural things. Perhaps you have an illness that the doctors cannot treat, or you might be expecting a child, If you're a keen gardener, you might pray for rain. God is over all of these things.

Not People – God is sovereign over people. Is there a person who is causing you a real headache at the moment? Someone treating you unfairly, or someone you just struggle to get on with? Pray for them and also pray for yourself because God is sovereign over people.

Not Fortresses – God is sovereign over physical things. We have plans to build a second manse and David and the team have been working hard with the architects to get things moving. When we looked at the plans, David said to me how he had a sense that the Lord's hand was upon this project as things were clicking into place. What about money? During the credit crunch, many people are worried about their finances. God is sovereign over physical things.

Nothing can stand in the way of our God – not things natural, not people, not things physical – our God reigns over all.