

The God of Unusual Victories

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God achieves victory through the faithful obedience of His people, no matter how unusual His commands may seem.

Wimbledon 2001 was the scene of one of the greatest dramatic events in tennis—it was, at least, for Goran Ivanisevic. The former 1992 Australian Open champion had fallen so far from his glory days that he needed the gift of a wild card to enter the Wimbledon tournament. He and the other players probably thought his presence would not be much more than an uninteresting rerun. He had made it to three previous Wimbledon finals and was the lucky loser all three times. But this year was different, even though the final included a formidable opponent, double faults, superstition, and doubt. Against all odds, the 125th-seeded wild card triumphantly held up the Wimbledon trophy. It was an unusual victory.

Joshua 6 contains one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture. There is the protagonist—Israel; the antagonist—the city of Jericho; suspense—the marching around the wall of Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day; and there is resolution—the wall of Jericho came tumbling down! Like Ivanisevic's win many years later, Israel's dramatic victory was against all odds.



What obstacles do people in our churches sometimes see as insurmountable?



When have you been surprised by God's work in the past?

In this session, we will read the story of the fall of Jericho. The Israelites were commanded to obey God and follow His unusual instructions in the face of unfavorable odds. We will see how God used apparent foolishness to confound the worldly wise. We will see the power of an unseen God over visible might. And in the story of Rahab, we see God extending mercy and grace to anyone who will trust in Him. As believers in Christ, we trust God to fulfill His promises and extend mercy, and for this reason, we obey—even when the circumstances appear unusual.



Voices from Church History

“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”¹

—Augustine (354–430)

1. God promises victory over His enemies (Josh. 6:1-5).

¹ Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. ² And the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. ³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.”

The city of Jericho was locked down. Its gates were tightly shut up because the inhabitants were fearful of Joshua and the Israelites. But the God who fights for Israel has a master key to every door in the universe and can open doors that are closed (Rev. 3:7)—even those in Jericho. That’s why, here, we see the Lord reiterating what He said generally in Joshua 1:3: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.” But what a strange battle plan—marching around the wall of Jericho!



When God has led you in a specific direction, how do you hold fast to His instructions when others doubt whether or not you have heard from God at all?



How do you weigh what you believe God is calling you to do with the doubts or concerns you hear from other people?

God used a seemingly foolish battle plan to accomplish His purpose—“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27). But throughout this action plan, we see that the Israelites *must be involved*. God would execute what the Israelites implemented. God’s people must participate in the battle of Jericho by marching around the wall and God would give them victory by bringing down the wall.

God told Joshua the priests would make an extended blowing of the shofar, which would be followed by the shouting of the entire army. God’s unconventional battle plan showcased trumpet blowing preceding shouts, and the action would begin with a few and then spread to the rest of the people. Consequently, Jericho would experience an unimaginable cataclysmic and catastrophic event—the wall would collapse. This thick wall would implode upon itself without a bulldozer or a wrecking ball because God would bring it down. God’s instructions, however, were not enough to bring down the wall. His plan required the Israelites to act in faith.



Voices from Church History

“Faith obliterates time, annihilates distance, and brings future things at once into its possession.”²

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834-1892)

What are some parallels between God’s strange instruction to the Israelites regarding the wall of Jericho and God’s call to Abram to leave his land and go to an unknown destination God would show him (Gen. 12:1)?



How do your actions show belief in God's divine plan for your life?
Church? Small group? Family?

2. The people prepare for victory over God's enemies and obey (Josh. 6:15-21).

Joshua delivered God's marching orders, and the people prepared for victory by obeying. So they marched around the city once a day for six days. Regardless of any inward doubt, the Israelites obeyed God. They marched in silence around Jericho's massive wall one time for six days. Were their feet tired? Were they exhausted? Were they yearning to whisper a small complaint to a neighbor or friend? Maybe the mighty men of war felt embarrassed as they marched in silence. Or did they feel a sense of renewal of strength because they were doing the will of God in God's way?



When life's realities make you weary, how do you ensure your thoughts and words point to faith in Christ (2 Cor. 10:5; Prov. 18:21)?



What are some ways believers can remind one another to focus on and obey God's plans instead of focusing on themselves and/or what others think?

¹⁵ On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city. ¹⁷ And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.



¹⁸ But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it.

¹⁹ But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”

²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they

captured the city. ²¹ Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

On the seventh day, the marching constituency made seven revolutions around the wall of Jericho. At the end of the seventh circuit, Joshua gave the command. The people shouted *before* the wall fell—not after. They shouted in faith, believing God had given them the city. Believers must not wait until the battle is over or until the wall has fallen—they must shout in their current situation. Believers must not wait for the perfect time to witness. Christians must pray, study the Word, and be willing to tell their story whenever the opportunity arises.

God’s instructions to the Israelites reveal the importance of words and actions. The people could not utter a word until Joshua gave the order to shout at the sound of the long trumpet blast. Perhaps God wanted the Israelites to display their faith in action before using voices to illustrate a lesson.



How does faith “in action” give added credibility to expressing our faith “in words”?

God moved at the sound of the shout and brought the wall down in such a convincing way that the text says the wall fell down *flat*! Not one stone was left on top of another. The wall that was so thick that houses could be built within it, the wall that was so wide that a chariot race could take place on top of it as chariots rode side by side without falling over—that wall fell down flat. This is the power of God.

Joshua 6 reveals how God works His victories through human obedience—the army marched, seven selected priests blew the shofar, and the masses shouted—it was only then that the wall fell. Faith produces works. Individuals involved in the march are obedient to God, walk by faith, and watch God do what only God can do—bring down the walls!



Why do you think God chooses to work through our obedience rather than apart from us?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

45. *The World Opposed to God*

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by faith in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

3. God delivers a remnant from among His enemies (Josh. 6:22-25).

This story is a spectacular example of God’s power exercised on behalf of His people and His judgment of His enemies. But it also contains a thread of mercy. As the conquest of Jericho began, Joshua remembered the oath that the two spies had made with Rahab, who had given them shelter. He sent the spies to rescue her and the family members gathered in her house.

22 But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, “Go into the prostitute’s house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.”²³ So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel.²⁴ And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.²⁵ But Rahab the prostitute and her father’s household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

When Rahab is mentioned in Scripture, she often receives an infamous designation. She is called Rahab “the prostitute” (Josh. 2:1; 6:17; Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25). Interestingly enough, it is only when Rahab is associated with Jesus in His genealogy in Matthew 1:5 that this dubious designation is dropped. There the text says, “Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab” (not Rahab *the prostitute*). Boaz would marry Ruth, and they had a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse. Jesse had a son named David, and Jesus is the Son of David, which makes Rahab a great, great, great (you get the idea) grandmother of the Messiah.



What is the significance of Jesus having a woman in His ancestry who was once a prostitute?



How is God’s grace to the undeserving on display in this story?

Despite her sordid past, Rahab was an effective witness. She brought her father, mother, brothers, and all her extended family members into her house. Because they were in the house with the scarlet cord in the window, they were spared (Josh. 2:18). What an amazing example of God’s mercy!

Like Rahab, believers are called to share the good news with unbelievers. We are to call people “into the house,” letting them know they can be spared from the judgment of God through the blood of Jesus if they come *inside*.

Make no mistake. Just as God kept His promise to the Israelites in the conquest of Jericho, God will keep His promise in preserving a remnant. For this reason, we trust God and obey Him by loving the enemies of God and praying for them to become disciples of Christ. We reach out and teach through prayer, through the Word of God, and through our testimony.



It is easy for Christians to adopt an “us versus them” mentality with the world. How does God’s promise to save people—even among His enemies—change our mind-set?

Conclusion

It will not be easy for believers to minister to enemies of our God. It was not easy for Jesus to give His life for the lost (see Matt. 26:39). However, obedience is the example Christ set for His followers. Jesus’ life teaches believers to obey, act justly, love faithfully, walk humbly with God, and make disciples (see Mic. 6:8; Matt. 28:19-20). God’s ultimate victory over His enemies takes place through the faithful obedience of His Son. Through witnessing to others, prayer, and study of the Word, believers participate in God’s unusual victories.

CHRIST CONNECTION: God’s ultimate victory over His enemies takes place through the faithful obedience of His Son.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to battle against evil in this world using the weapons of prayer, His Word, and our testimony.

1. How can the weapons of prayer, God's Word, and our testimony serve to combat evil in this world?

2. What are some ways we can display our faith "in action" in our community?

3. How would you plead with someone who feels too far from God and too sinful to be reconciled with Him?

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