

## It Doesn't Make Sense Joshua 6

We're going to conquer Jericho by walking around its walls blowing a trumpet? Really? Now, Joshua had seen the Lord do some miraculous things. Joshua had walked on dry ground through the Red Sea with a wall of water on his right and on his left. He had eaten manna from heaven. He had led the Israelites in battle against the Amalekites, and had seen that victory depend on Moses holding a staff up in the air. And of course most recently, he had seen how God had stopped the flow of the Jordan River so that he and all the rest of God's people could cross into the land God had promised to give them.

Yes, Joshua had seen God's power displayed in amazing ways. But walking around and around the walls of Jericho for seven days had to make him wonder. For all during that time, he and the rest of the people of Israel got a good long look at what was clearly an impossible problem. They saw the city resting on a great mound of earth, encircled at the bottom of the hill with a retaining wall 12-15 feet high. On top of the retaining wall was a mud brick wall six feet thick and at least another 20 feet high. Then, on top of the mound there was another mud brick wall encircling the city itself, an area of about 6 acres.

There's no way they could penetrate those walls. And if the Israelites decided to besiege the city, the people inside could probably wait them out. Even today, there is a spring that provides water to the site. And according to chapter 3, this military operation took place during harvest time, so the people of Jericho would have lots of food to eat. In fact, some grain has been found in jars by modern archeologists digging at the site, and they estimate that the city could have withstood a siege for years. Oh, and Joshua knew all this, because the spies who had stayed in Rahab's house had brought a full report back to him.

And so, as the people of Israel walked around the city, they just knew that the conquest of Jericho was impossible for them. That fact became more clear with each and every step. The more they looked at Jericho, the more they had to wonder about God's promise to tear those walls down.

Sometimes it's hard for us to believe God's promises, isn't it? When we are faced with addictions or temptations that seem so overwhelming, God's promises of power seem so vague, so far away. When we are in the middle of difficult relationships, struggling with people who ought to be the closest to us, God's promises of peace seem so weak, so ineffective. When we face chronic illness in ourselves or our loved ones, or even when sickness reaches the point of death, God's promises of comfort and resurrection can seem, well, a bit beside the point.

But the good news is that God does in fact keep His promises. The good news is that God can, in fact, do the impossible. And He proved this when He made all the walls around Jericho

fall down – and again, the archeology agrees with the text. Archeologists working several different digs on the site have found piles of mud bricks outside the foundations of both the inner and the outer walls. That means that the walls did indeed collapse outward in all directions, their bricks forming ramps that allowed the people to go up into the city, every man from where he was standing.

Yes, there can be no doubt that God kept His Word, no matter how impossible it seemed to Joshua and the Israelites. God kept His Word, and He didn't need any help from His people to do it – they didn't tear down those walls. The God Who smote the Egyptians with all those plagues, the God Who parted the Red Sea and stopped up the Jordan River, the God Who spoke the universe into existence – for this God, causing a few mud-brick walls to collapse is no big deal.

And we need to remember that this same God still promises to be with His people in the midst of our troubles even today. The same God who broke down the walls of Jericho can break down walls of hatred and bitterness, walls of addiction and besetting sin, walls of sickness and death. The same God Who gave His people victory over the people of Jericho can give us victory over fear and frustration, over discouragement and despair, over weakness and worry. Whatever our problems may be, no matter how impossible they may seem for us, they are no match for our God.

But there's something else we find in this text. For if it didn't really do any good for the people of God to walk around the city for seven days, why did God ask them to do that? Why did they have to wait a week for Him to perform this great miracle?

Well, what if Joshua had just told the people about the walls around Jericho, describing how high and thick they were? Or what if God had destroyed those walls just as soon as the people came in sight of the city? Well, that still would have been a very impressive display of God's power, and I'm sure the people would have praised God for performing such an amazing task. But remember, having to sit by the banks of the impassable Jordan for 3 days, watching all that flood water go by, had to make their sudden disappearance all the more amazing. Just so, walking around those forbidding walls for 7 days had to make their sudden collapse all the more miraculous. After that weeklong walk, there was no way for the people to deny that only the power of God could have brought those walls down.

And I wonder if the same thing might be true for us. I don't know about you, but when a problem presents itself, my first inclination is to think I can solve it myself, so that's what I try first. It's only after I've run into a few roadblocks that I tend to remember to pray and ask God for help. In short, getting a good look at my problems, a process which sometimes takes awhile, tends to deepen my dependence on God.

So, what if God were to answer all our prayers right away? What if God were to solve all our problems right now? If we didn't have to persevere in prayer, would we really know how much we need Him? Would we truly trust Him as much? And would our praise of Him be as great when He finally does the impossible for us, bringing us the relief that only He can provide?

But if it's true that God has power over problems that are impossible for us, and if it's true that sometimes waiting on God can increase our trust in Him, there's something else in this story that doesn't make sense. For if it's true that God was going to bring those walls down all by Himself, why did God tell the people to do all that walking? What earthly good did marching around and around the city actually do? And if God just wanted His people to think about the impossibility of the problem for seven days, why couldn't they have just sat down outside the city and stared at the walls? That's what they did by the banks of the Jordan River for three days, so why wear out so much shoeleather?

And why would God tell them never to rebuild the city – what harm would it do for them to have a strong fortress in a strategic location? And why would God tell them to destroy everything they found in the city except for all the metal objects? We already know that the people of Jericho had gathered in at least part of their harvest, so there would be all kinds of fresh food in the city – that sure would taste good after all those years in the desert. The people of Jericho probably also had lots of livestock – a barbecue sure would be a great way to celebrate their victory, right? And remember, God had stopped showering manna on the people as soon as they crossed into the Promised Land. God obviously wanted them to forage off the land, so why should they destroy the very food God wanted them to eat? What sense did any of this make?

And we understand this kind of confusion, don't we? For doesn't our common sense sometimes contradict what God has told us to do? I mean, think about what we're doing right now. Does it really make sense for us to come in here and sit quietly for a whole hour every week, praying about our problems instead of getting busy trying to fix them? Does it really make sense for us to spend all this time studying passages from a 2000 year old book that we've already read before? How can a sip of juice and a bite of bread satisfy our hunger and thirst when we take the Lord's Supper? How can washing our bodies with water possibly have any effect on the spiritual uncleanness inside our hearts? No, from a purely practical perspective, none of God's means of grace can do us any earthly good.

And what about the way God has told us to live our lives? Does it really make sense to take a whole day off every week so we can worship God, when we have so many things to do? Does it really make sense to remain faithful to your marriage vows when you don't feel the same sort of attraction you used to feel? And as we read last week, does it really make sense to love our enemies and to make ourselves vulnerable to those who hate and abuse us? No, the fact is

that in our sinful world, our heads and our hearts often pull us in directions that God's Word says we shouldn't go.

So, why did God ask the people to walk around and around the city, doing something that didn't really contribute to the great victory He accomplished for them? Well, why did God want them to wait for seven days before solving their impossible problem? So their trust in Him could grow. In the same way, God often asks us to do things that don't make sense to us so in order to demonstrate that trust. As James tells us in our responsive reading (James 2:14-26), faith without works is dead – it does no good to say that we trust in God if we aren't doing what He tells us to do.

Think about it this way: if God asks you to do something that you want to do, or something that makes sense to you, why do you do it? Sure, because God told you to, but you probably would have done it anyway. Love my spouse on my wedding day? Sure thing. Praise God when I'm feeling thankful? Easy. No, it's only when God asks us to do something that doesn't make sense, something that we wouldn't want to do otherwise, that's when we can most clearly demonstrate our trust in Him. Love my spouse when he or she has gotten on my last nerve? Praise God when I've been beaten up or put in jail? That takes real trust, real faith.

That's the sort of thing that Rahab did. Today's passage reminds us of the story we read in chapter 2, of how she had placed her faith in God, trusting that the people of God would indeed conquer Jericho, and begging them to save her and her family when that happened. No, the idea that those strong walls could be so easily breached didn't really make sense to her. And she certainly didn't want to see her town destroyed and all her friends put to death. But she had demonstrated her faith by protecting the spies who came to see her in chapter 2 and by tying a cord in her window so that she and her family could be identified. She trusted God, but she also put her faith into action, doing something that didn't really make sense to her.

And isn't that the same thing that Jesus did, really all His life? I mean, did it really make sense for Him to leave the comforts and joys of Heaven, taking on human flesh so He could experience the sorrows and temptations of this sinful world? With all power in Heaven and on Earth at His command, did it make sense for Him to allow Himself to be arrested, unfairly tried, beaten, and crucified? Did it make sense for Him to take on Himself the sins of a world full of people who despised and rejected Him? Did it make sense for Him to trust the Father even at the moment of His death, committing His Spirit to the One Whose justice He was at that moment satisfying?

Of course it didn't make sense – it didn't make any more sense than those people walking around Jericho seven times. But because they were willing to obey God, they received an impossible blessing. Because Rahab was willing to obey God's messengers, she and her family

were saved from destruction. And because Jesus was willing to give Himself up to satisfy the Father's justice, all who trust in Him have been saved from the power of sin and death.

So, as we look at those impossible problems we all face, let's trust God to solve them in His way, and in His time. But as our waiting help us build our faith, may our obedience to God, even in things that don't make sense to us, demonstrate that faith and express our praise.