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Sermon Series: *Looking Up*, No.2

Reason to Shout

January 23, 2022

Joshua 5:13 – 6:20 (NIV)

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

¹⁴ "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

¹⁵ The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

6:1 Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

² Then the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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."

⁶ 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." ⁷ And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord."

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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!" ¹¹ 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.

¹² Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury."

²⁰ 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.

We're in the book of Joshua, Chapter 5, this morning, if you'd turn there with me. Joshua, Chapter 5.

Last week, we looked at Israel's first foray into the land God promised to give them and saw that, of the twelve tribal leaders that Moses sent to explore the land, only two, Caleb and Joshua, recommended that Israel *do* as God said and move to *occupy* the land. The rest, the other ten, said they should forget about it, because the people that already lived there were too powerful and there were too many of them for Israel to conquer.

By the way, we didn't get to this last week, but that same ten accused the land of being *too* good. They thought it was so good that it would always be a source of trouble for those who lived there. That's what they very likely meant when they said, "*this land devours its inhabitants.*" They were saying the land was so good that other peoples and nations would be constantly trying to take it away from them, and so whoever occupied it would be constantly fighting off invaders.

That's a pretty hopeless way of looking at things, isn't it?

That's like saying, "You should never have anything of value because somebody will just steal it from you," or, "Don't marry him, or her, because they're so talented or so good looking or whatever that someone will always be trying to take them away from you."

Now, the fact is, the ten wound up being right in a way; I mean, modern day Israel probably *is* the most fought over little piece of land in the history of the world.

But you can't live your life borrowing trouble from the future like that – expecting the worst. If you do, you'll never do *anything* – even that which God Himself *tells* you to do.

Of the twelve, Caleb and Joshua were the only ones who, in spite of how things looked, said, "Hey, if *God* says we can take the land, then let's *take* it!"

And see, Joshua got a book of the Bible named after him for that kind of faith.

I don't know what Caleb got. Maybe he married a very pretty, talented girl, but see, we're still reading about both of them hundreds of years later.

We don't read about the other ten, do we? That is because Scripture says the Lord struck them down with a plague right there for leading the people to doubt, and that was because they chose to live their lives imagining the worst, moping around, intimidated by the bad news of their day – *always looking down*.

Joshua and Caleb, though? They chose to look *up* and believe that God was there and would keep His word, no matter how things appeared.

That is why they're examples of faith to us.

Now, by the time we get to *this* passage, it is 40 years or so after that fateful 10-to-2 vote, and lots had happened in those intervening years, both good and bad.

At this point, Israel has served its 40-years-in-the-wilderness sentence; Moses has died; Joshua was put in charge, and the people are back at the border of Canaan and ready, this time, to trust the Lord. They are looking up as they say to Joshua back in Chapter 1, *“Whatever you command us we will do – and whoever rebels against your word – will be put to death!”* (Joshua 1:16-18).

So, they cross the Jordan river and immediately encounter the city and fortress of Jericho.

They had already spied it out and even found help from within from a woman named Rahab, who was, depending on how you translate the word, either a prostitute or an innkeeper, or both.

Whoever she was, she was someone who *also* lived life looking *up*, because she *knew* – she could *sense* – that God was *real* and at *work*. We know that because she admitted to Israel’s spies that all of Jericho – even though it was a fortress full of weapons, even though it *had all* that Israel *did not have*, and even though all visible evidence would suggest the people there had *nothing* to worry about – all of Jericho was deathly afraid of these Israelites.

So, she protected the spies and helped them escape when the authorities came looking for them. She even lied to her own king about them, so confident was she in her confession, back in Chapter 2, that *“the Lord your God is God of Heaven and earth.”*

You see, that’s a person who lives life looking up – one who is convinced that reality is made up of far more than just what can be seen, because God *is in*, and He is *at work in*, the world today.

Rahab had the same perspective that compelled Joshua and Caleb to lead Israel up against the fortress of Jericho.

The truth is, it would require a truck load of faith to do what they did.

And you can’t help but wonder if God knew, on the very eve of the invasion, that Joshua needed a last-minute booster shot of faith, and so this *“man with a drawn sword”* appears to him there in verse 13.

He identifies himself as the *“The commander of the army of the Lord,”* which suggests that he’s an angel.

At the same time, he does not stop Joshua from bowing down to him. An angel would not allow that, which suggests that He is either God Himself or the pre-incarnate Jesus.

Scholars disagree about who exactly he *is*, but what’s more important, really, is what he *does*.

He does two things:

First, he does something that would remind Joshua of a very important event, long past, that Joshua had certainly heard much about: God’s meeting with Moses at the burning bush.

Back there, just like here, a great mission of freedom was about to begin, and direction and encouragement were needed.

So here, just like back at the burning bush, because the ground was holy, shoes had to come off so that God’s chosen leader could come close.

That tie to Moses was not lost on Joshua.

The second thing the man does is that he tells Joshua precisely what he very likely needed to hear: there in verse 2, he says, *“See, I have delivered Jericho, its king and all its fighting men into your hands.”*

It’s funny to me that the message begins with the word, “See,” because that’s surely not what Joshua *saw* as he stared at this huge, imposing fortress. Its walls were likely 15 feet tall and super thick. And because Jericho sat on a slope, archaeologists think at least part of the city had a tiered, double wall, which would make it seem more like 40 or 50 feet tall.

So, if you’re Joshua standing there looking at that, the last thing you “see” with your physical eyes is any hope of taking this city.

But the Commander of the Army of the Lord wasn’t looking at the city with just His physical eyes. And so, neither did Joshua.

Instead of looking at the walls, Joshua looked up, beyond the walls, to the Lord and chose to believe Him: to believe what He said about taking this city, and more specifically and amazingly, to believe about *how* to take this city. And this took another truckload of faith to embrace, since the battle plan he was given was, you might say, “unconventional” at best.

It involved no mass army, no surprise attacks, no night raids, no spears, bows, slings, shields or battering rams – no weapons of any kind, in fact. Just marching and horn blowing.

This was the first-ever marching band, you see?

And it was the band that would play and win the football game!

And, the plan included *one, big shout*. But until the command for the shout came, they weren’t even allowed to talk, which itself was strange because cat-calling and insults and chest-beating were all a normal part of warfare in those days.

Do you remember the whole David and Goliath thing, where Goliath would come out every day and yell, “Your mother wears combat boots!” to Israel’s army?

All that was part of the battle process.

But not here.

There in verse 10, look at how specific the directions were and how they built on each other. Joshua said, *“Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word,”* until I give the signal.

But when I do, then shout with everything you’ve got, and the wall will fall straight down and you can rush in and mop up.

That was the plan. There was not a shred of human sensibility in it. It was all God’s idea, so you’d have to be looking up to even *think* this could work, much less to stake your *life* on it.

And look what happened!

Look what can happen when enough of God’s people decide they’re really going to trust Him – they’re really going to live their lives looking up to Him, and they’re really going to do whatever He says, no matter the risk or how crazy it sounds.

The greatest, most imposing of challenges can be met and overcome if God wants it to happen and if God's people will listen to Him.

He'll give His people a reason to shout.

But *why* did God do it *like this* – in the way He did? That's a key question here, isn't it?

Why did God do this so unconventionally?

Now, if you grew up in the Church, you know this story so well, maybe the "unconventionality" of it has worn off.

But, come on, this battle plan is downright strange.

And beyond this, as you think back through all the ways God has worked with humanity in accomplishing this or that or the other, you realize that God very *typically* works in unusual, strange, ways, from our perspective.

Why?

Why doesn't He just do things in a straightforward way?

One reason is because God is not just interested in *getting something done*. God's interested in *changing people* along the way.

You see, a task-oriented person just wants to get things done in the quickest, most efficient manner.

But God is *people-oriented* at heart, so even though He certainly has definite plans for our world and is working them out, His plans for *people* mean way more to Him than efficiency or time-tables.

God loves *people more* than *production*, which is a big reason why He does things in ways that seem so strange to us.

Now, certainly, God was intent on this happening to Jericho, because this was the beginning of God's judgment on the Amorites – something that was promised to Abraham centuries before. You can find that in Genesis 15.

This was divine judgment. That is why God was entirely justified in doing what He did to the nations that occupied the land of Canaan. Some people have trouble with that, but those people forget what those nations did to deserve it.

So, there was no doubt this judgment was going to happen, sooner or later.

But God was more interested in building His people Israel than He was in tearing down Jericho's walls – *not* because these *Hebrews* were so *special*, but because of the *incredibly special mission* they were to *carry out* in the world, you see?

So, He tears down the walls in a way that builds up His people's faith, because, at the end of the day, to follow a plan that seems crazy and then have it work so well: *that* builds faith in the architect of the plan more quickly than anything else.

The crazier the plan plus the better it works equals more faith-filled people, and more glory to God.

Just think of all the times in Scripture where God works like this: Noah and the flood, Sarah's conception, Mary's conception for that matter, the escape from Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, David and Goliath, Balaam's talking

donkey, the feeding of the five thousand, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Peter escaping from jail – there are hundreds!

Plans that look, sound and seem utterly crazy.

In every case, far simpler methods could have accomplished the task.

But the bigger thing God was trying to do was to capture the trust of the people.

And you know, He's still trying to do that today.

Why does God do things the way He does? Doesn't the way He works in our lives sometimes seem so inefficient and needlessly complicated to us?

Why does He take us through this or that or the other?

Why does He make us wait so long for things?

Why does He ask us to do things that seem so strange at times?

Why the complexity?

Why involve all these people?

Why the drama?

Why doesn't He just give us what we want?

Ah, that's what we really want to know, isn't it?

That's really what we're asking.

That's really what frustrates us: that He doesn't just give us what we want, but instead He leads us here and there and through this and that and the other.

Why?

Because He's more interested in building us into people of faith than He is in accomplishing some random task.

And that's because whatever task it is – even if it's life or death, it's temporary.

But our souls – the souls of people – are eternal.

And to get the eternal stuff where it needs to be, we have to exercise the faith muscle.

We have to learn to trust Him.

We have to learn to do things His way and in His time.

We have to look up.

And just as He had to do with Israel, sometimes He has to take us around the barn a few times to get us to look up and choose to trust.

Is God doing that in your life – even now?

Does He have you on your third trip around the barn – or wandering in the wilderness somewhere?

Is He asking something of you that looks as imposing as the walls of Jericho?

Maybe He's trying to get you to work a plan that just seems nutty to you, and you've been saying to Him, "God, this is so – *inefficient!* Why don't you just do this or that or the other?!"

Ah, give thanks for God's inefficiencies! He's building trust in you!

He's building faith in you!

He's trying to prepare you so that when your Jericho comes, you'll be ready and able to look up and to see way past the walls – clear up to the God you *know* can take them down.

Will you trust Him to work His plan in His way for your good?

Maybe you need to tell Him that this morning, “Lord, I don’t understand the why, but I believe you’re doing this the way you are for my benefit. Help me to not lose sight of that.”

If you need to tell Him that, why don’t you do it? That, itself, is a confession of faith.

Or maybe you need to ask Him for the faith to even get to that point – to trust Him for the plan. You could ask Him for that too.

Prayer: Father, you know where each of us are on our journey. You know what we’re facing today.

You know your plan for us – and you also what we think of it.

Would you help us to respond to you in faith – to look up and realize you work for our good – because we’re on your side. Amen.

Closing Song: *The Battle Belongs to the Lord*

Benediction: No matter the battle, God has a one-word military strategy for His people: obedience. Actually, that’s God’s strategy for anything and everything good in our lives: if we’ll look to Him and listen to Him, we’ll succeed in every important way – and we’ll bring Him glory.