

Old Testament Survey - Part 26

by Dick Woodward

The book of Joshua is a study on faith, with 16 separate illustrations of faith, demonstrating how faith works and how to possess spiritual possessions.

Duration: 27:28

Scripture: Joshua 1:9, Joshua 6:20, Psalm 27:13, John 2:5, Hebrews 11:31

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Old Testament History"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Joshua as a powerful illustration of faith, contrasting it with the book of Numbers which focuses on unbelief. It highlights the perpetuation of faith from Moses to Joshua, the perplexities and problems of faith, and the importance of obedient faith. The sermon emphasizes the need for practical faith that walks and works, using the story of the battle of Jericho as a prime example of faith in action.

Transcript

Now as we continue our survey of the Old Testament, we come for the second time to the book of Joshua, which is the great book about faith, which is the book that is one great big illustration of what faith is and how faith works. As we have seen, the book of Numbers is a book about unbelief and the book of Joshua is the opposite. The book of Joshua is the book of faith.

The Greek word for coming out is the word ek, and that's why we have Exodus, which means the way out. And the Greek word for into is the word eis, and so someone has said that just as the book of Exodus is called Exodus because they came out of Egypt in the book of Exodus, the book of Joshua should be called eisodes because in the book of Joshua they're going into a land. In the book of Joshua they're going into the land of Canaan.

And as we study the record of their going into the land of Canaan, we have a great big illustration of faith. I think about 16 separate illustrations really of faith. And when you put all these illustrations about faith together, you have a pretty good idea of how to possess your spiritual possessions, how to receive from God the charisma that will make it possible for you to abound unto every good work.

The first thing we see in the book of Joshua is what we might call the perpetuation of faith, where we see the mantle of leadership passing from Moses to Joshua. It says, Joshua was full of the Spirit, for Moses had laid his hands on him, so the people of Israel obeyed him and followed the commandments that the

Lord had given to Moses. After the death of Moses, the Lord's disciple, God spoke to Moses' assistant, whose name was Joshua, and said to him, Moses, my disciple, is dead.

You are the new leader of Israel. Lead my people. Be strong and brave, for you will be a successful leader of my people.

You need only to be strong and courageous and to obey to the letter every law Moses gave you. For if you are careful to obey every one of them, you will be successful in everything you do. Constantly remind the people about these laws, and you yourself must think about them every day and every night so that you will be sure to obey all of them.

Only then will you succeed. Be bold and strong. Remember, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Here's a great truth in the Bible about leadership. It is the intent of God that every leader should train a successor. Every Paul should have his Timothy, and this works beautifully in the case of Moses and Joshua.

We see in this transition of leadership, there was a time when Moses was leading and Joshua was following, but now Joshua is leading and the people are following Joshua. I think that means that everybody did something right. And in this charge that's given to Joshua as he becomes the leader of the people of God, you have a good picture of what faith is.

Notice the emphasis upon the word obey. You must obey to the letter. You must actually enter into this promised land and lead my people to conquer Canaan, and that's a matter of obedience.

The word faith in the book of Joshua is obedient faith. It's the kind of faith that obeys. We also see in the early chapters of Joshua what we might call the perplexities of faith or the perplexing problems of faith.

If we could eliminate all the problems of faith, we would eliminate the need for faith itself. So we mustn't be disillusioned when we come up upon problems when we study faith. The character Rahab in Joshua chapter 2 raises a problem for many people.

If you were like Corrie ten Boone in Holland during World War II and God laid it upon your heart to hide some Jews in your basement or your attic, if you were convicted of God that what was happening to the Jewish people, this genocide of the Jewish people, if you were convicted that that was absolutely appalling and an abomination in the sight of God, and God laid it upon your heart to hide Jews in your house. Now suppose the Gestapo came to your house one day and a German officer took his pistol out and banged on your door with it. When you opened the door, suppose he said, are there any Jews here? And suppose there were six Jews up in the attic.

What would you say? And when you take a course in philosophy, you always get to that section on ethics, and when you get to the section on ethics, they nearly always ask you that question. You see, what is the supreme ethic of the Christian? Is the supreme ethic of the Christian to always tell the truth and never tell a lie? Should you say, because you're a Christian, I cannot lie, go up there and get them and burn them. And as they're taking the Jews out to kill them and burn them, you stand there saying, I'm just as righteous as I was when you came here.

It's too bad about those Jewish people, but I'm righteous. Is that the supreme ethic of the Christian? Well, in the story of Rahab the harlot in Joshua chapter 2, that's exactly what happens. Some Jews come to her home and she hides them.

And when the authorities come looking for these Jews, she sends the authorities away, another direction. She's commended for this. We read about her in the New Testament, in the Living Bible, that Rahab the prostitute is an example of faith.

She was saved because of what she did when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Many people have a big problem with this. They say, wait a minute, I've been taught to be a rock of integrity, and here this prostitute lies.

I mean, there she is, you know, she just lies like a rug and she's listed in the heroes of faith because she did this. And they just can't understand that. It's a big problem to many people.

But if you look at the story closely, you see that it was not the fact that she lied that caused her to be a hero of faith. It says again in the Living Bible, in Hebrews 11, by faith, because she believed in God and his power, Rahab the harlot did not die with all the others in her city. You see, when those spies came to the house of Rahab the harlot, she said something to them that demonstrated faith.

She said, I know that you people represent the true and the living God. Many people over here fear you greatly. We believe that God is with you.

And she says, listen, when you come into this land, promise me that you won't kill me. Now, they make a covenant with her. They say, take this scarlet rope and tie it to the window of your house.

Her house was on the wall of Jericho, the wall was that wide that a house could be on it. And of course, that red rope that hung out of her window is a beautiful picture of salvation, like Noah's Ark was back in the book of Genesis. But they say to her, tie this red rope to your window, and anyone who's in this house with you, all your loved ones, will be spared.

Everybody else is going to die in Jericho, but you'll be saved. Now, why was she saved? Because she hid the spies and lied about it? No. Because she believed that those people were the people of God, and that the true and the living God was behind everything that was happening to them.

And she wanted to express her faith in that. It was her faith in that. That's why she was saved.

Incidentally, she's found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, because she had that faith. I believe that red rope that hung out of her home, we might call that the picture of faith. So in the opening chapters of Joshua, first of all we have the perpetuation of faith from Moses to Joshua, and then we have the perplexities of faith, but then we also have this beautiful picture of faith.

And don't forget, as you study Rahab the harlot, her most important characteristic was her faith. That's what saved her, that's what saves everybody. In chapter 3 you have the proving of faith.

Notice this truth as you come into this book, which is such a study on faith. When God is trying to give us the faith to enter our spiritual Canaan and claim all of our spiritual blessings, he will very often confirm and affirm our faith to encourage us. We'll find this when we come to Gideon, who put out a fleece, and God honored that fleece.

The Berkeley translation in Psalm 37, verse 23, says, The steps of a believer are confirmed by the Lord. That means that as we take steps of faith, God blesses and confirms those steps of faith to encourage us that we are walking in the way in which he is leading us. The reason why he dealt so severely with those people again in the wilderness in the book of Numbers was, he said, ten times I proved it to you.

Ten times I performed miracles and proved it to you, but you wouldn't appropriate that faith, even though I proved it to you and confirmed it and affirmed it ten times. So God does confirm our steps. He does this early in the book of Joshua.

He affirms Joshua, and he illustrates to the people that the blessing is upon Joshua, just like it was upon Moses. Then he also affirms all the people with miracles. The purpose of these miracles is to show these people that God is with them and that when they go across the River Jordan and enter into Canaan, he will bless them and be with them.

In chapter 4, they build what I call the pillar of faith. As they cross the River Jordan, even though it is flood-tied, the waters miraculously part and they cross the River Jordan on dry ground, just like the Red Sea, it says, 40 years previous to this experience. As they cross the River Jordan on dry ground, they are commanded to build a kind of a pillar of rocks, a kind of a monument, a memorial to this great miracle.

Here you have the same message that you had in Deuteronomy. It's so that your children might know about this miracle. One day your children will ask you, what is that pile of rocks over there? When they ask you, then you tell them.

This is a good principle in educating children. Just answer their questions. Abraham Lincoln used to say, if you have a curiosity and a memory, you will be educated.

It's just a matter of time. Children usually have a very healthy curiosity. We should honor that curiosity by answering their questions.

The purpose of this memorial was that the adults might remember and that the children might know. In chapter 5, you have what we might call a prerequisite to faith. They are getting very close to the invasion of Canaan.

Just before they invade Canaan, they are commanded to circumcise the entire male population. The practical reason for this was that that second generation apparently never was circumcised. The first generation, remember, has died in the wilderness.

This is the second generation of the people of God, and apparently the males have not been circumcised. Here you have a beautiful illustration and an insight into faith. Before you enter into the promised land of God's blessings, is there any sin in your life? Is there anything of which you need to repent? I think repentance, that order of repentance that Abraham built, is an order many Christians bypass.

They end up disillusioned and wonder why, and they discover they never really had a clean break with sin. God never dealt with the sin in their life. You have to deal with the sin in your life before you can expect God's blessing, and perhaps this commandment to circumcise the male population illustrates that.

In Joshua 5, we have what we might call the prescription for faith. This comes right at the end of the chapter. Joshua has issued the order that nobody should unsheathe their sword.

It's very, very dark when you go out to these places, even today. It's hard for us to imagine in our cities with our streetlights what it's like to be out in a wilderness where there is absolutely no light. If an army were out there, camped on the east of Jordan, and it's pitch black, they could easily be ambushed by an enemy, and so they would usually issue the order, Don't unsheathe your sword, therefore if they see anyone with his sword unsheathed, they know immediately it's an enemy and they can react quicker to this.

Joshua goes out for a kind of a midnight walk. It's the night before the battle of Jericho, and he sees a man with his sword unsheathed. Joshua challenges him, Are you friend or foe? The answer is, I am the commander-in-chief of the Lord's army.

It says, Joshua fell to the ground before him and worshiped him, and said, Give me your commands. This commander-in-chief said, Take off your shoes, for this is holy ground. And it says, And Joshua did.

All these people of God will see as we survey the Old Testament, all these men of God have their spiritual experience. They all have a subjective spiritual experience. This was Joshua's experience.

This experience is what the theologians call a theophany, an appearance of God in some human form. In this case, in the form of a soldier who turned out to be the commander-in-chief. I don't know what Joshua saw that convinced him this was the Lord, but immediately he knew it was the Lord.

He was on his face worshiping this commander-in-chief, saying, Give me your orders. Apparently the orders that were given to Joshua were a great challenge. Joshua will illustrate later at the second battle of Ai that he was a military genius.

This was his first military campaign as the leader of God's people. Of course he wanted to demonstrate his military genius, but on this occasion this commander-in-chief, who is the Lord himself, gives him a ridiculous battle plan. Strategically it's ridiculous.

It must have been a great challenge to Joshua. According to chapter 6 in the book of Joshua, this was the battle plan that Joshua received from the Lord that night before the battle, and this is the plan that is carried out in chapter 6 to the letter. They are told to come out of their encampment and they are told to go around the city of Jericho.

First there was a large body of armed people, then seven priests blowing on ram's horns, then some priests carrying the ark, and then the rest of the military people, perhaps even the rest of the population. They were to go clear around the city the first day and go back out to their camp and spend the night. Come out the next morning and do the same thing.

Do that every day for seven days, but the seventh day they were supposed to go around the city seven times. That means a total of thirteen times they were commanded to go around that city. I say this is ridiculous military strategy because when they attacked these big fortified cities, the walls were wide enough to build homes on the top, as you can see here in this artist's rendering of the city of Jericho.

The enemy usually, the people defending the city, would put up on the wall there all the 4Fs and all the women and children and the people that really couldn't bear arms, and they had everything up there but the kitchen sink. They had red-hot coals and they had boulders and just everything. And if the enemy came anywhere close to that wall, they just dropped all of that on them.

One great general named Abimelech was shamed by the fact that he went too close to the wall when he was attacking a city. We'll read about this in the book of Judges. And an old woman had a millstone up there which was 18 inches in diameter, they ground corn with these millstones, and she dropped a millstone on Abimelech's head.

With a skull crushed, he said to his hammer-bearer, take my sword out and run me through, lest it be said that a woman killed Abimelech. And so they ran him through with the sword so they wouldn't say a woman killed Abimelech. That became a kind of a monument in military strategy to the army of Israel.

Never go close to the wall. That's how Abimelech was killed by an old woman. You see what God was telling Joshua to do? Take all of your people right up to the wall, do a right face, go around that wall, expose everybody in your nation to everything on that wall.

Thirteen times do that. All the time they were going around that wall, they were told not to say a word, complete silence, except for these seven priests who were blowing these little ram's horns. That's the only noise they made.

Now, just imagine if you were up here in the city of Jericho and you saw this army approaching, and they have such an awesome reputation, and like Rahab says, they're pretty much feared and respected, and you say, my goodness, they're coming right up to the wall. What are they up to? And what are they carrying in that box there? What is that, an atomic bomb or something? What is that? Are they going to blast this wall with something? And what are those silly little horns that those priests are blowing? And they must have been discussing that on the wall. And after they go clear around the city, they go back out into the woods again.

I'm sure they burned the night oil that night in the Pentagon in Jericho, trying to figure out, what are these people up to? The next morning, same thing, and they're probably just so filled with awe, they don't drop anything on them, they wonder, what are they up to? Nobody does that. And then that seventh day, they think, well, here we go again. They say, oh no, they're coming around again.

Look at that, there they go again. Again, again, again. Now, after seven times on that seventh day, Joshua turns to the people and he says, shout! And somewhere between two and three million people shout.

Ever been to a football game and heard maybe ten thousand people? That's usually all you can get to cheer, about ten thousand people. Ever hear ten thousand people yell at one time? That makes quite a sound. Somewhere between two and three million people could have been in this group.

Imagine when they all shout at the same time. Some of the more liberal theologians say that it was their walking around that city that caused vibrations that caused these walls to collapse, and some say it was the shouting that somehow caused it. It takes more faith, as we saw at the Red Sea, to believe some of the liberal explanations than it does to believe the miracle.

The book of Hebrews settles the argument for us. The book of Hebrews says, the walls of Jericho fell down by faith. I believe that's exactly what made those walls fall down.

Faith, especially the faith of this little man right up here. See that little white figure up there? That's Joshua. He was what they call in the point.

He was right out there leading all those people. I believe that took faith. It took faith for that man to expose all of those people to everything on that wall.

The walls of Jericho are immensely wide. If you've been to Jericho and seen them, you know that. When you see the excavated walls of Jericho, it looks as if they're standing up, but really they're lying down flat, but that's how thick they were.

I remember being in Jericho on one occasion, and it's very hot in Jericho, and we went into this little store that sold soft drinks. It was the only cool place in the whole country, it seemed, on that day. There was a woman in there just flaked out on a bench, and her husband was trying to persuade her to come up the hill to see the walls of Jericho.

He said, If you don't come up here, you may never see this place again. She said, Do I have your word for that, George? Will you put your hand on a Bible and swear to me I'll never see this godforsaken place again? She never wanted to see Jericho again, or the walls of Jericho. But if you've seen the walls of Jericho, you know that they fell down flat.

That's the the timing of the earthquake. After Joshua obeys God in every detail, then there's an earthquake and it kind of swallows up the walls. Apparently the ground opened up and they went down, because it says they charged the hill on level ground, which means the ground must have swallowed them.

But if it was an earthquake, it was like that earthquake in Philippi when the jail at Philippi was shaken apart so that the prisoners were able to escape. It was a miraculous earthquake. But what's the devotional application to the story of Joshua and the battle of Jericho? I believe the devotional application is this.

When Joshua led those people around Jericho 13 times, he had a plan. Militarily that plan was ridiculous, and he was a military genius. He knew what a good military plan was.

Why did he follow that plan to the letter? He followed that plan because he knew one thing about that plan, he knew it was God's plan. He knew God told him to do it. So even though it seemed ridiculous, he did it.

You see, Joshua 6, just like the whole book of Joshua, is telling us what faith is and how faith works. Joshua 6, the battle of Jericho, is telling us the kind of faith that makes it possible for us to enter into our spiritual promised land and receive the charisma to live like godly people. That kind of faith is practical.

It's a faith that walks, just like Joshua walked around Jericho 13 times. Just like all those people walked around Jericho 13 times. That's faith.

Faith isn't something mystical, something all that subjective. It isn't all that difficult a concept to understand. It's like obedience.

It's an expression of faith in that it's obedience, it just walks. But the story of Jericho, the real application is this, the faith that walks is the faith that works. That's the faith that works.

That's the kind of faith that wins the battles. That's the kind of faith that won the battle of Jericho. That's the kind of faith that worked at Jericho, the kind of faith that walked.

Now I wonder, is your faith that kind of faith? Do you think that faith is some sort of an intellectual proposition? You know, Jesus told us in the New Testament that his word was not just the word of another

rabbi coming down the pike. He said, My word that I'm teaching you is the word of God. When people questioned that in the 7th chapter of the Gospel of John, they said, How can we know that? Jesus said, If any man wills to do God's will, he will know, whether this teaching comes from God or whether it's just the idea of another rabbi.

What Jesus said was, If you really want to know, you have to do. That's just the opposite of the way the intellectual likes to approach things. The intellectual likes to say, You get to me here, reach me intellectually, and then I'll follow through volitionally.

But Jesus said, No, it's the other way around. You commit yourself volitionally, and then you'll become convinced intellectually. First commit yourself, first walk around Jericho, and then you'll discover a faith that works and wins.

But you've got to commit yourself to walk. You have to commit yourself to it. The intellectuals have been saying for generations, centuries, really, Believing is seeing.

I really believe that the scripture puts it this way. David in Psalm 27 says, and he did a lot of living, I would have fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of God in the land of the living. The intellectual says, contrary to what I said, Seeing is believing.

But God has always said, Believing leads to seeing. I think that's what we see illustrated in the battle of Jericho. When they committed themselves to walk around Jericho 13 times, they proved God, and God proved them.

I knew a man who was called of God to build a radio station in Quito, Ecuador, and he was a man who walked with God. His name was Dr. Clarence Jones, and he built the station HCJB in Quito, Ecuador. He said that one day God laid it upon his heart to build an antenna of a certain mountain, and he said God made it unmistakably clear that that antenna should be built on that mountain.

He called this divine radar. He said through his divine radar, God showed him that's where the antenna should go. All the engineers said to him, Clarence, that's a mistake.

There are minerals in that mountain that will just draw in and magnetize that signal, and that signal won't go anywhere. So he would go back to his prayer closet and pray, and God would say, that mountain, that's where you build the antenna. This old man had enough faith to go against all the engineers, all the expert advice, and he said, put the antenna on that mountain.

Those minerals that the engineers said were going to magnetize the signal and draw it in did the opposite. They repelled the signal and it bounced all over the world. He was asked to lecture all over the world on this electronic miracle that he pulled off by putting that antenna on that mountain.

He was asked to go out as if he were a genius of some kind and tell how he knew so much that he should do that. I thank God for people who believe in divine radar. I believe in divine radar.

I believe it's possible for God to come to you, it's possible for God to communicate with me a plan, something he wants us to do. Sometimes he'll deliberately test our faith with that plan. It may be a plan like the plan of the conquest of Jericho, militarily it's ridiculous, and God may give us a plan like that sometimes just to test our faith.

If you know God well enough, if you trust your divine radar enough to know that God has told you to do it, Jesus again put it this way, whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. The mother of Jesus said this to the servants there at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, whatever he says to you, do it. If you know God is telling you, it's always safe to do it.

God doesn't always do it this way. We'll see this at the second battle of Ai, where Joshua demonstrates the fact that he's a military genius. God is a God of order and design, and the normal thing is that he has a plan that's spiritually and wonderfully made.

But there are times when God will test our faith like he did the faith of Joshua. But never forget as you come to the book of Joshua, that this chapter, chapter six at the heart of the book tells us that faith is practical. It's a faith that walks, and it's a faith that works, and it's a faith that still wins the battles of life.

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