

I told you this morning about the time we moved home in **December** one year and the day of moving out didn't go as we planned. At one stage the new owners of our old house had moved **in** and we hadn't got the keys to our new house – we were homeless for a time.

Well, the **other** half of the story of that move – actually moving **into** the new house – isn't any better. The move **in** didn't go as we expected **either**. Arriving at the house late afternoon, getting **dark** because it was winter, the piles of boxes and possessions had to just be unloaded and dumped in the house **quickly**, to be sorted later. At least we were **in**, We spent one or two nights there before going up north to visit my family.

When we came **back** we had to have damp proof work done – plaster off the walls, woodworm treatment done – floorboards of the ground floor removed – kitchen taken out, leaving just a tap in the corner. We couldn't live there for a while and the three of us – Peter was only 2 – went to live with Wendy's mother. So moving in didn't go the way we were expecting it to.

This **morning** we looked at the time God moved his people out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea. This **evening** I want us to look at how God moved them **into** the land he'd promised them, in a way which **they** didn't expect either. The events came after Rahab had helped the two Israelite spies sent by Joshua to spy out the city of Jericho. You'll remember, we looked at **that** story last Sunday. Let's turn to the book of Joshua 5:13.

When we read a story like this, when there are battles and killing, I'm sure that we may well feel **uneasy** about God being in control, and his own **people** being responsible for these acts. Today, we quite rightly disagree with acts of war and conflict. **So why the fighting and killing here?**

We have to see the Old Testament perspective on this conquest of those originally living in the land which God had promised to the **Israelites**. And to do **this** we have to return to Genesis chapter 15, when God promises the land of Canaan to **Abraham**, forefather of the people of Israel. In verse 7 God says to Abram, *'I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you **this** land to take possession of it.'* And he goes on in verse 16 to say, *In the fourth generation your descendants will come **back** here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'*

Abraham would not inherit the land straight away, because God was being **patient** with the Amorites, one of the peoples in the land. But when their sins had reached their limit, God was going to use his people in **judgement**. This conquest of the inhabitants of the promised land was **not** a matter of war and killing for killing's sake.

In the 5th century, there was a tribe in central Europe that **enjoyed** invading other lands and killing everyone in their path and causing utter chaos and carnage wherever they went. They were called the **Vandals**, who obviously gave us the terms vandal and vandalism.

God's people were **not** like that. God was using **them** to bring judgement on the people who'd shown **wickedness**. They're not land-grabbing vandals, but instruments of judgement on people who were persistent in their sin.

Deuteronomy has something to say here too: chapter 9:4 reads, *'After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do **not** say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my **righteousness**." No, it is on account of the **wickedness** of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you.'*

So we see God being patient in justice here, but finally when their sins are **so** great, he acts through his people to bring judgement on them.

We have to be aware that we've **all** sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we've **all** gone our own way, not **one** of us has by nature wanted to go **God's** way. We've all neglected the purpose we were **created** for, to be in a loving and obedient relationship with **God**. So by **nature** we're under God's anger, because the wages of sin is death, we deserve God's judgement for our sin, and this means death, **eternity** without God.

But **thankfully** we can **also** remember that God is gracious and compassionate. He doesn't **want** to judge and in his second letter, Peter talks about a day of judgement which is certainly coming – nobody knows **when**, but it is coming – when God's final judgement will fall on those who don't recognise **Jesus** as Lord and King. But he says God is not **quick** to deliver judgement, he says, *'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness. He is **patient** with you, not wanting **anyone** to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance.'* 2 Peter 3:9.

God is being **patient**, **delaying** judgement, he doesn't want **anyone** to die; he wants everyone to turn to **him** and accept his love shown in his son Jesus, and live life in relationship **with** him. **That's** what he wants. But a time **will** come when he says, 'Enough is enough.'

Let's return to our story in Joshua. And in the first section, we find Joshua realising that he and his army aren't fighting on their own. **Not fighting on their own**. From verse 13 of chapter 5 to chapter 6:5 we have Joshua's encounter with the 'commander of the army of the Lord'. We ignore the chapter break here, and read it as one section.

As Joshua is here going into battle, it's completely **appropriate** for this man to appear with a drawn sword in verse 13, and saying he is the commander of an **army** in verse 14. Joshua will have seen this as a great encouragement and **comfort** as he was going into battle against one of the most heavily fortified cities, defended by well-organised fighting men.

But this man isn't just the commander of **any** old army, he's the commander of the army of the **Lord**. The Hebrew word used here – saba – can be translated as '**host**', and can refer to a heavenly host of legions of angels. The same word is used by David in Psalm 103:21 when he writes, '*Praise the Lord all his heavenly **hosts**, you his servants who do his will.*' And again in Psalm 148 we read, '*Praise him, all his angels, praise him all his heavenly hosts.*' So rather than just being encouraged to see an extra few **men** come to join in the fight, Joshua now has the legions of the army of **God** fighting for them.

This is no **normal** battle. This is no **normal** commander. This is the commander of the **Lord's** army. The ultimate responsibility for this battle isn't resting on **Joshua's** shoulders or on the strength of the **Israelites**, but on the commander of the **Lord's** army. Joshua and his people aren't fighting on their **own**. This is **God's** battle. **He's** bringing judgement on the people of Jericho. God's **commander** is in charge.

Joshua **realises** he isn't dealing with a conventional soldier here. He recognises this is God's commander, and this results in respect and reverent submission. He falls face down to the ground in reverence, verse 14, and takes off his sandals, verse 15. This'll remind us of when God spoke to **Moses** in the burning bush in the desert when he was given the mission to bring his people out of Egypt. In Exodus 3:5 we read, '*Do not come any closer,*' God said, '*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground*'. Then he said, '*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the god of Jacob.*'

So at two crucial points in the history of God's people – as they were to move out of **captivity**, and as they were to move **into** the Promised Land – God spoke to the leaders – Moses and Joshua – in similar circumstances. Joshua **knew** who was talking to him, this was the **Lord**.

‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’ Joshua asks.

Chapter 6, verse 1 tells us of the great **task** that lay ahead of God’s people – Jericho is shut up, well fortified, apparently the walls were 25 feet high and in places 20 feet thick – it seems **hopeless**. But in verse 2 the Lord says, *‘See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.’* Victory for God’s people is so **certain** that the Lord speaks in the **past** tense here – *‘I have delivered Jericho’* – the victory is already a certainty. **Nothing** is too hard for the Lord. The commander of the Lord’s army will achieve this.

We probably won’t be called to fight any **physical** battles like this in our lifetime. But there **are** many battles we have to face day to day; battles that God calls us to face if we are **his** and doing his will. We’re going to come up against opposition – Jesus said that **he** faced opposition in his time, and so **we** must expect to face similar opposition as we live **for** him. But the **great** thing is that as we face these battles, we face them in his **name**, and we face them with his **armour**, and we face them knowing that he fights **for** us and victory is **secure** because God will **always** win the battle.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, *‘... be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.’* Ephesians 6:10,11. He speaks about being armed with **truth**, the **gospel** and **righteousness**, he talks about being armed with **salvation** and the sword of the **Spirit** which is the word of God. These are all **God’s** – **his** truth, **his** gospel, **his** righteousness, **his** salvation, **his** word. He fights for us, the battle is **his**, the **victory** is his. *‘Thanks be to God!’* Paul writes, *‘He gives us the **victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ.’*

We’re not fighting on our **own**.

The Lord goes on in verses 3 to 5 to tell Joshua how he’s going to **gain** this victory over Jericho, and he soon finds out that these aren’t going to be the **normal** ways of combat – he’s **not fighting in his own way, but in God’s way**. The army are to walk round the city for six days, blowing trumpets, and then on the seventh day they are to do the same, but on **this** day they’re to give a loud shout and the city walls will **collapse** and they’ll defeat the enemy.

If the brigadier of the army today were to go to Afghanistan, and tell his troops, **‘Listen**, chaps, I’ve had a good idea – let’s march round this Taliban stronghold, blowing our trumpets, and then when we give a loud shout victory will be ours – let’s give it a go.’

I'm not sure that his soldiers would say, 'Ok, sir, whatever you say.' I think they'd probably roll around the floor in **hysterics**, and wait for the men in white coats to take the brigadier for **treatment!**

But the battle of **Jericho** was no **ordinary** battle – this was **God's** battle, it was to be fought in **God's** way. God says through Isaiah, '*For **my** thoughts are not **your** thoughts, neither are **your** ways **my** ways.*' Isaiah 55:8.

We don't know the discussions that went on between the soldiers when they heard about what God wanted them to do, but they did **obey** the Lord, they did what he **told** them to do, recorded in verses 6 to 15. Joshua and the people of God were all **involved**: just because it's God's battle, - remember **he's** bringing judgement on the people of Jericho – that doesn't mean that his people sit **idle** while **he** conquers the enemy. No, God uses his people as **instruments** in that battle. They're **all** involved: the armed guard at the front and the seven priests blowing their trumpets behind them, with the rear guards – as the name suggests – at the rear. And they circle the city **each** day for seven days.

But what they **do** is not the most important part of the plan – look back to verse 6; the **first** thing Joshua tells his people to do is **this**: '*Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord.*' **Repetition** often tells us important things in passages of Scripture, and in this chapter the ark is mentioned ten times. The **ark** is most important here.

Why? Well, the ark of the covenant signifies the presence of **God** with them. The covenant between God and his people is his **promise** that they will be **his** people and he will be **their** God. So the ark signifies that God is with his people, and it's the Lord's **presence** here as they go round the city wall that makes the difference. **God** is with them.

You'll remember from our study of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea this morning that the Egyptians were terrified when they said, '*Let's get away from the Israelites! The **Lord** is fighting for them against Egypt.*' [Exodus 14:25]. And last week when we looked at Rahab's story in Joshua 2, she said, '*I know that the **Lord** has given this land to you and a great fear has fallen on us,*' [Joshua 2:8].

God's **presence** with his people and **his** power are what's going to bring the victory – his people's **activities** are only secondary. There'll be no doubt that it's **God** who wins the battle. He'll gain the glory. Remember this morning?

Likewise **today**, God uses his people as his instruments, but we do things **God's** way, we don't rely on our **own** methods.

2 Corinthians 4 talks about us being like jars of **clay**, nothing **special**, but what **is** special is his treasure that is **within**, his **presence** within us by his Spirit. Paul says, *'we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing **power** is from **God** and not from us.'* God has **work** for us to do, we have **battles** to face, but it's **his** all-surpassing power that brings the victory. We're not fighting in our **own** ways, we fight in **his**.

And because the power which made the walls collapse isn't his **army's** power, they shouldn't claim the **glory** either – they're **not fighting for their glory, but for God's**.

We read about what God's people do on the 7th day in verses 15 onwards. [Re-read 15,16]. I don't think that verse 17 actually follows verse 16 here. **Think** about it – Joshua tells his people to **shout**, they're going to **shout** – they're not going to listen to what he goes on to say in verse 17. I think the writer puts it in here to give it **importance**. I'm sure he did **say** it to his people, but probably not here as he told them to shout. The actual **story** continues in verse 20. So what's important in the verses in between?

Verse 17 tells us: *'The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the **Lord**.'* There are instructions and warnings here. Rahab and her family are to be **spared** because of their faith in God; others and **material** things are to be 'devoted to the Lord' – which means that they are either to be **destroyed** or brought into the Lord's treasury. Remember this victory is for the Lord's **glory**, not for his people. So nothing must **detract** from God's victory by any claim to **self-glory** by the people.

God will fight and bring victory, God will win the battle his way, but in gaining glory for himself he demands **obedience** from his people.

Last week we were discussing temptation, weren't we, and here is one of the greatest areas for a Christian to feel the pull of the devil's tempting voice. When God does something through **you** – perhaps you speak to someone about the Lord Jesus and they respond and they give their life to him; or you say a word that really comforts someone in their time of need; or you say something which is the final word they need to kick a habit. And you **know** it's **God** speaking through you and enabling you to give help, but something inside you says, 'Didn't you do well? You should be really **proud** of yourself.'

God fights the battles, **he** gains the glory. We give **him** the glory because without him the battle would be **lost**. Don't be tempted to take the glory for yourself. Even in the mountain-top experiences, we need to remember obedience to the Lord. 6

Even in Israel's great victory **here**, there's the temptation to disobey; and as **evidence** of this, read chapter 7 sometime, where we read of Achan, who took some of the gold and silver and a robe for **himself**, and this caused the army to be defeated in their next battle at Ai. A future sermon perhaps!

Verses 17 to 19 are included at this point in the story to remind God's people that in order for God to gain the glory, his people have to remain **obedient**. Calvin said, 'We cannot rely on God's promises without obeying his commandments.'

There are **only** one and a half verses given to the actual conquest of Jericho – verses 20b-21, the trumpets sound, the people shout, the walls collapse, they charge in and take the city. It's **more** important for God's people to remember **obedience** and to give God the glory for the victory he gave them.

We remember **obedience** and give God the glory for all he achieves **in** us and **through** us.

We've talked about the battle and the killing taking place here, utter destruction of the whole city, **awful** devastation. Verse 24, '*Then they burned the whole city and everything in it.*' We've said that God was bringing judgement on the people of Jericho because of their persistence in sinning **against** him and not acknowledging him as God. But **in God's way there's salvation**.

In the midst of this carnage, we find **hope**, we read of the salvation of Rahab and her family. You'll remember that she was the one who helped Joshua's spies to escape because of her **faith** in the God of the Israelites, she **recognised** him as '*God in heaven above and on the earth below.*' Joshua 2:11b, and cast herself on his mercy.

Look at verse 25: '*Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho – and she lives among the Israelites to this day.*' Rahab and all her family were **spared**, they were **rescued**, they were **saved**, because of her faith in the one and only God. Take **heart** – a person from a pagan background, with a not too pleasant past, can know the salvation of God. God looks on the **heart**, although all around may be perishing, God saves those who put their trust in **him**. He saves them to a life with him and his people **forever**. In the midst of **judgement** there is still room for **salvation**.

Just **think** – the **other** occupants of Jericho could have escaped – but they **refused** to do what **Rahab** did. **She** cast herself on God’s mercy, and was saved with her whole family. Others could have done the same. They chose **not** to.

All reminders of the former occupants were **destroyed**. Nothing remained of that old life – Rahab began a **new** life, the old had gone, the **new** had come.

Salvation is freely available to **any** who will acknowledge God as the Lord, to **all** who accept his forgiveness for going the wrong way, to any and **all** who take Jesus’ work on the cross and in his resurrection as the only way of salvation. There’s **new** life waiting for **all** these.

God has fought the **ultimate** battle against his enemies, he’s won the victory in **his** way, through the saving work of **Jesus**, he’s gained the glory in defeating sin, the devil and death, all we need to do is **acknowledge** it and be **obedient** in going **his** way. Then we will know the **salvation** of God –the old has gone, the new has come.

We have to see that God is angry with sin, he **does** bring judgement. But he does give opportunity of **salvation**. We need to make the **right** choice. Going **God’s** way **will** bring battles, but they’re **God’s** battles – he’ll fight **for** his people, in **his** way, for **his** glory, bringing salvation to those who believe and obey.