

# The God Who is Powerful

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Date: 13 October 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, so we're going back this evening to continue in our studies in Joshua. If you're visiting with us, we've been looking at the first few chapters in Joshua up till now, and so we come to this passage.

Last week we looked at the Crossing of the Jordan and the memorial stones that were brought up, and now we're looking at the Fall of Jericho. And so the first thing we notice is really that this is a story of God working in an ancient civilization.

So I want to say that at the beginning, that God is working in an ancient civilization, and by the very nature of that, we recognise that we're going to have to do some work.

Okay? I think we can be, sometimes we can be a bit too simplistic when it comes to God's word and when it comes to these Old Testament stories. It's not simply cut and paste truth, that we can just cut and paste and apply to our life today, as if, you know, circumstances are easy to understand. We need to recognise this story as part of an ongoing story from a long time ago. A real God working in a real time, but not our time.

[ 1 : 15 ] And we need to allow our minds and our understanding to grapple with that. So what I'm going to do first is I'm going to do the first point of application now.

And then we're going to look at the story, because the first application is very important. The first application comes from a question which is, how do we interpret a chapter like this for today? How do we take this kind of story, which is all about blood and guts and destruction and annihilation and death and God behind that?

How do we interpret that for today? Does it justify a holy war? Does it say that Jihad is okay? Does it mean that the Bible's happy with indiscriminate killing?

What does it say about the mercy of God or the person of God? You know, you might not grapple with these questions. You've been, many of you, you've been brought up with a story and, you know, it's a happy children's story when we tell about the Joshua and the Battle of Jericho and the walls come tumbling down.

And we forget the kind of brutal side of it. And so, but many coming into our churches, many who don't know about the gospel or don't know much about the Bible will have lots of questions about a chapter like that.

[ 2 : 29 ] And if you're sharing the gospel with your friends or if you're speaking to people who are not Christians but who are exercised about spiritual things and who are interested and have questions, this is often a question that will be asked.

It will be asked about the God of the Old Testament, a harsh, oppressive, brutal God who is very different from the God of the New Testament.

So I just want to give you two principles to take away, not just for this story, but for any story that we're reading in the Old Testament. The first is you must let Scripture interpret Scripture, okay?

So you must recognize this story as part of the story of God that develops and changes and further events shed light on earlier events to help us understand.

So we must let Scripture interpret Scripture. You can't simply pull out a story like this and let it stand on its own without recognizing its place in the Bible.

[ 3 : 35 ] And we recognize that the Old Testament, and particularly this part of the Old Testament, we have a God with entering into history with specific interventions during a temporary time, a focused time.

He was intervening for a specific reason. He was revealing the seriousness of sin. His actions were in keeping with the day in which it was revealed.

And all of these events lead up to the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the killing of Christ on Calvary.

And we need to see it in that light. But in this temporary period, the people of God in the Old Testament became the instruments, both of God's mercy and of God's judgment.

And they were protected in that Old Testament period because they were the cradle through which Christ would come. It was through the people of God, through the Old Testament people of God, and that line from the seed that was promised in Genesis 3 to Christ coming, it was through God's people.

[ 4 : 46 ] And they became a protected seed, therefore, against the opposition and against satanic darkness, against them. And often we see just shadows of grace in the Old Testament and clear reality of judgment.

But at Calvary, and I'll say a little bit more about later, we see Christ being judged, Christ being destroyed in the same way that Jericho was destroyed, and destruction being meted out on him as our substitute.

And sin was ultimately defeated on the cross at Calvary. And so in the New Testament, following on from Jesus, following this judgment, sin is defeated, and our calling is to make disciples and to spread the good news, to love our enemies.

And the war that we face is a spiritual war, not a physical war. We don't fight physical enemies. We are to wear a spiritual armour and recognise spiritual battle.

In Matthew 6, it speaks about the armour of God that we need to wear. And so we look for God, knowing that Scripture, interpreting Scripture and the reality of these temporary times of physical judgment in the Old Testament, pointing forward to the judgment of Jesus Christ on the cross.

[ 6 : 16 ] We let Scripture interpret Scripture and recognise what our role today is as Christians, is to be fighters, but fighting spiritual battles, not physical battles, and not judging and being used as God's weapons of judgment, instruments of judgment, as it were.

So in all of these difficult stories, we must let Scripture interpret Scripture. That's the first principle. The second is we need to let God be God, okay? That's very important.

We'll work hard at understanding this passage because it's difficult, but we need to understand that God is at work, and God is true to Himself, and He's true to His promises, and He's true to His grace and to His warnings and to His judgment.

And we often find in the Bible outworkings of both judgment and mercy. And that will be shocking for you, and it's shocking for me, because He's holy and He is perfectly good, and you and I are not. And so we struggle with that. We struggle with His holiness, and we struggle with His justice, and we struggle with His purity, and we struggle with His judgment because we actually think, I'm not so bad.

[ 7 : 28 ] I don't really deserve this. And so there's this constant recognition of battling with who we are before a holy, just and merciful God.

I want to give you a quick example of the danger of interpreting a story like this without recognizing the rest of Scripture, without doing some work and knowing more about what God is doing.

And it was an example I used to use a lot with youth groups that we did. I can't remember where it came from originally. I think it was maybe a tear-fund example. I can't remember, but it was in the 80s, and it was at the time when AIDS, there was a AIDS epidemic, and it was about not judging people without having more knowledge of the situation and loving them.

And it was an illustration which, for you were the person who had a cure, one cure for AIDS that you could give to one person. There was only one cure that you could give, and you had four people in front of you, and you had to decide, you know, I do this with us, a youth group, and you had to decide which person was worthy of getting the cure.

And so there was a businessman, there was a prostitute, there was a single woman, and there was a baby. And so they would spend some time discussing who would they give the cure to, who was the one person of these four victims who had AIDS, who was worthy of getting the cure.

[ 8 : 58 ] And then you unfolded a little bit more information. So the businessman had a wife and two kids. The prostitute was a prostitute and a slum. The single woman was from a rich family, and the baby had been infected by her mum.

So he gave them some more time to think with that little bit more information, who would get the thing, who would be right, as they learned a little bit more about the situation. And then the third

piece of information always was something that changed their thinking.

So the businessman who had a wife and two kids had sex with a prostitute when he was on a business trip. The prostitute in a slum sells sex to support her child.

The single woman from a rich family was raped by soldiers at war. And the baby who was infected by her mum is orphaned and is dying of malnutrition.

So it reminds us that, you know, we're quick to make judgments and people can look at a passage like Joshua, and that's a very imperfect example. But it does make us think about the need to be as well informed as we can be about Scripture and about these passages in Scripture, especially when people throw them at us and say, well, that's the kind of God you've got.

[10:14] It's crazy. I don't want anything to do with that. We need to be reminded that these are difficult passages, and sometimes there are not easy answers. We wrestle with them, but we seek to be guided by God and submit to God's perfect justice and knowledge and appreciate that we need wisdom and grace to understand them.

So in going through this story, I just really want to say a couple of things. First of all about Jericho's judgment and then how does that Jericho judgment speak to us today?

So I use that word deliberately because this is a story of judgment because of Jericho is being judged. The people of Jericho and the Amorites are being judged in this story. And so I use that very deliberately because this story and many others in the Old Testament, they tell us about the nature and character of God and of humanity that is in catastrophic opposition and rebellion to the living God, the author of life, resulting in humanity being alive but being on death row.

And there's a real stark reality of that for humanity. Not just then, but for all humanity in all of time. And yet within that, there's a hope of rescue, of life and unimaginable reconciliation with this infinite God in His spectacular glory who has given us an opportunity to be dealt with in mercy and to be dealt with in grace.

And that's the truth we all need to come to terms with about God as He reveals Himself throughout the Bible, primarily as it's revealed in Jesus at Calvary.

[12:04] But this shadowy story speaks into that because it reminds us both about His saving work but also about His saving work through judgment and that's an important distinction to make.

Because in this story, we see a lot about God as Savior. When we broaden a little bit more from the passage itself, there's lots of indications that God is working with His people here, the Joshua and the people of God.

He's revealed Himself to them as a Savior already and they are descendants of Abraham and they are His covenant people and He has already rescued them.

They're not a particularly, they're not in any way a worthy people. But He's rescued them and He's saved them. In chapter 5, we didn't read the passage because it was long enough the passage we read.

We told that after they'd come over the Jordan miraculously and they celebrated the Passover. Now the Passover was a celebration they did once a year to remind them that they had been enslaved, that they had been dying, that they'd cried out to God and God had rescued them.

[13:22] You know the story of coming out of Egypt. And when they did so, when God rescued them, He made promises to them that He would give them a land, He would give them a home and He would never fail them.

And this is God outworking these promises. So they celebrated the Passover, which was God's reminder to them that they were a saved people.

And also, a bit more painfully, they reinstated circumcision because that was the covenant sign, the physical covenant sign that they belonged.

They were a people who were set apart from God, set apart for God and belonged to God. And the evidence of that was through the shedding of blood. Now, although that was a symbol and a painful symbol at that, it actually also symbolized a heart that was changed to love God, even in the Old Testament like that, due to Run in May 30, verse 6.

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live. It's the same message of the gospel, but in the shadows of the Old Testament, they were a people who'd been redeemed to love God, God revealing Himself even at this point as their Savior.

[14:40] And as Don mentioned in his prayer, there's lots of... Don or maybe it's Colin, can't remember. Someone mentioned the fact that God works with us as individuals all the time.

And we see that in the story. And there's individual stories of God working as Savior in the story, both with Joshua, who worshiped God and who obeyed every last letter of God's commands to Him.

And also Rahab, who is miraculously, and we look to the story of Rahab a couple of weeks ago, who's miraculously redeemed and who follows God and who is saved from the impending judgment.

And so, in these huge, big, complex and difficult stories, you've got personal interventions of God at work in people from very different contexts, both who come to terms with God, both who are worshipers, both who cry for mercy, one with the privilege of coming up from God's covenant people and the other from hearing about God in a foreign country, with a gentile, an outsider, and the Bible's full of these stories of individuals coming to faith.

And the church is full of stories of people coming to faith, individuals coming to faith in Jesus Christ. And so we see that in this story of Jericho's judgment, God reveals Himself as Savior, but He also reveals Himself as Savior through judgment.

[16:11] And it's probably the difficult part of the story where He commands that the whole city, animals, people, life, so everything goes is to be destroyed and only the silver and the gold is to come into the temple.

It's devoted, it's set apart for God in judgment. And I just say one or two things about that. The first is that this judgment of God was a long time coming.

This is 15 verse 16 where God's speaking to Abraham about the promise of entering the land. He says, And your people shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

So here He's speaking about the people, the wider people were called the Amorites here. And 400 years before, God says, You will receive this land Abraham when the time is right for this people to finally be judged by Me because their wickedness, their iniquity is not yet complete, it's not yet full. He gave them a long time to repent and to turn to the living God. Rahab did. But others didn't. The background is God's covenant promise to Abraham to give them a home.

[17:29] And within that, as he was working and as the fame of God was spreading through the people of Israel, the Amorites, that people had many opportunities to repent and turn and believe and acknowledge God.

But they were violent and they were brutal and they were immoral and child sacrifice with the norm. Life was cheap and they were utterly dark and evil as a people.

So their judgment from God was long time come. This was God saying, Okay, you've lived, you've carried on living, but now is the time for you to face judgment.

And as God comes, this is God's work. This is not Israel doing their own thing. This is God at work. We recognize it's in the context, as much of the Old Testament is, it's in the context of human impossibility.

God made the promise to Abraham. He was an old man. He had no descendants. He had no children. His wife was old. He couldn't, they should be on childbearing age. And he was standing alone in the land.

[18:38] And yet God promised it would happen. He surrounded by enemies and the Egypt and the Red Sea and the opposition and then the desert and then the crossing.

And then here, it's interesting, you have the picture of the commander of the Lord and the end of chapter five. And then you've got a parenthesis at the beginning of chapter six before God speaks again.

Jericho was shut up inside and outside because the people of Israel. There was a sense of impossibility. The city was shut up. It was kind of like the castle.

It was high up. It was ramparts. It was impossible for Israel or anyone else to get into. And there was no way of defeating them. It had to be God working through them.

So God is Savior through judgment. And it's both a picture of judgment and victory. And we see that God is entirely at work here. So you've got the amazing story of the commander of the Lord's army coming to Joshua at the beginning of the end of chapter five.

[19:44] And you know, Joshua says to him, you know, are you with us or for the enemies? And he says, neither, mate, get it right.

He is the commander of the Lord's army. And he goes on to say, I've already delivered Jericho into your hands. This is God's work. And this is an Old Testament revelation of God in the flesh. Sword in hand, sword of judgment in hand. Joshua bows down and worship him. And he's not told not to do that. And this commander of the Lord's army, God himself, is not acting on anyone's behalf.

He's not on anyone's side. He's fulfilling his own will and Joshua's standing on holy ground. And he gives, he gives specific and unique and very unwarlike instructions that what you're to do is to, you're just to walk around the city seven times.

Say a little bit more about that in a minute. But this is God's judgment and this is God's work, not only from the commander of the Lord's army being there, but also because the Ark of the Covenant is absolutely crucial and central and in the middle of everything that the people of God are doing as they walk around the city.

[ 21 : 07 ] So the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned ten times in the story. And that's the Ark of the Covenant is the symbol of God's presence with the Old Testament people. It held the Ten Commandments and had the mercy seat on top of it.

And it was just a symbol of who God was with the blood would be sprinkled on the mercy seat on top where they would be forgiven. And there's a visible sign pointing forward to again the Christ and his work on the cross.

But so God's presence was going to be with them. This was God's fight. This was God's judgment. And then the enacting of the commands that God gives are interesting too because they're to walk seven times round and then on the seventh day they were to walk seven times round.

And seven in the Bible is God's number of perfection. And you may think this is a bit far fetched, but on the Passover meal they celebrated would have been followed in the feasts by the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread where they celebrated God's freedom and the removal of sin and God's rescue.

And so the seven trumpets as well were religious trumpets, speaking about jubilee and about freedom. And they were to be walked, they were to walk round each day once in silence.

[ 22 : 35 ] It's not a great sort of war, sort of instructions, is it, for a fighting corps who were standing in front of the Ark of the Covenant and behind it.

Can you imagine a young soldier, they'd prepare if he'd done his press-ups, he was all ready for the fight. And he was just looking forward to being in the battle and he was having to walk round in silence.

What's happening, you know? What's going on? What kind of war is this? And he would have to think as he was walking around. Then they went back to the camp and all they were seeing was the size of the walls and maybe the people of Jericho looking out, maybe even mocking them as they went round.

What kind of fight is this? I've got my armour on, I'm ready to go. And I've just been out there walking around like a fool. What's the point of...

And then on the seventh day, the shout that they were asked to do and the walls collapse miraculously. An act of God fulfilling his promises.

[ 23 : 36 ] And the people are then to enact God's judgment on that city.

Verse 17 speaks about that, it speaks about the city being devoted to the Lord. And that's a difficult concept, the city and all that's within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction.

And really for judgment, okay? You could say that as well. In other words, everything, everything in the city was going back to God from whom it came.

So he'd given them life, he'd given them children, he'd given them families, he'd given them food, he'd given them clothes, he'd given them everything, all his gift. And now in judgment, it was all being devoted back to him, in judgment as it were.

He was taking back life and it was returning to him the giver of these things. And now interestingly, everything in that city was devoted to God, either in judgment or salvation.

[ 24 : 41 ] Rehab was devoted to God also, but in salvation, because she put her trust and faith in God, she also returned to the Lord in salvation.

But those who would not repent and would not return are devoted to God in judgment. A city devoted to God. So God reveals himself as Savior through judgment in this chapter.

So how does it speak to us today? I hope you've begun to unpack and I've only really looked at it very briefly, a little bit of why when we see it in its historical context, redemptive historical context, how it points forward to something very, very important.

Is that Calvary is the ultimate fulfillment of what happened at Jericho, where Jesus Christ is devoted in judgment back to God this matter.

And so what we see in reality is that God takes on, in his unique character, three persons, one God.

[ 25 : 52 ] He takes our sin on himself. The Son is devoted to destruction in our place. He drinks the cup of God's wrath to the full.

And God's punishment, God's just punishment and sentence for death for our sin is paid by God the Son, who is devoted to destruction on the cross.

He atones for all that we've done. He satisfies God's judgment. He's paid in full. And He rises to life as our guarantee.

So Jesus Christ, interestingly, is the Savior through judgment, just as we see God at work in salvation through judgment in Jericho.

Jesus Christ, the cross therefore, always for us, if you're shaming the gospel for you with your friends, it's always a case that there is justice and judgment and bad news before the good news.

[ 26 : 56 ] But the absolutely good news is that for all who come to Jesus Christ and love and cry out to Him for salvation, then the price has been paid.

And His mercy is poured out. Rahab's a great example of that, right? In the midst of that Old Testament story, we've got a great picture of Rahab becoming part of the people of God, living forever.

And we'll meet her in heaven when we get there, and we'll be able to ask her about her own life of faith. And that is the greatest and the costliest and the most glorious act of love you will ever recognize anyone pouring out on your behalf.

It's everything. It's everything. The gospel doesn't go beyond that. It's absolutely everything is that we take all these complex and difficult passages in the Old Testament and we see them through the eyes of Calvary and they begin to make sense that God was saying, sin is really, really serious.

You know, we're no better than the inhabitants of Jericho than the Amorites. We're no better. We all under God's judgment unless we come to Jesus.

[ 28 : 13 ] Every single living soul. That's why it's also urgent. That's why it's also important. That's why the story of Jericho isn't just either a conundrum that we throw away in the side or a pretty story that we sing spiritual songs to it.

And it's a nice story about Jericho's walls falling down. But can I just say that archaeologically, there's lots of evidence that these walls did fall down miraculously.

And there is also evidence that part of the walls stayed up where rehab's house was. So we recognize that Calvary is the ultimate fulfillment of this story.

We also recognize surely through a story like this that his ways are not our ways. Isaiah 55 verses 89, for my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways.

For his heavens are higher than theirs, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. If we are worshipers, we need to understand that. We mustn't always be taking, bringing God down to our level and say, well, you've got to justify yourself here, God.

[ 29 : 18 ] You've got, I've got to agree with you. We have to let God, because his ways are higher than us. And trust can be difficult. Put yourself in the place of the soldier that's going around, who's trained for war.

He's walking around there and he's struggling. He's struggling to understand what God's doing and why God would be doing this. Well, put yourself in his place or just put yourself in a similar place where you're walking around something in your life and you're wondering, what on earth is God doing?

Is he interested? Does he care? What, his purpose is they don't seem to make sense to me. His ways are higher than our ways. He asks us to be patient and he asks us to worship him like Joshua did and all the craziness of what really Joshua seemed to be being asked to do, day to day, and to know his presence with us through that.

We don't have an ark of a covenant to walk in front of us. We don't have an ark of covenant we can place in these flowers. We've got Jesus Christ in our hearts, something far greater of which they are pointed towards.

I am with you, Emmanuel, Jesus with you. I will never leave you and forsake you. We only believe that when things are going well, don't we? When we think he's answering our prayers.

[ 30 : 41 ] And yet we're asked to recognize, you know, in the things we don't understand, that his ways are not our ways. They're higher than ours. And lastly, in terms of applying, I think we need to remember and understand that we do walk an impossible road, humanly speaking.

People of Israel, say, face Jericho, that was an impossible fight crossing the Jordan. It was an impossible crossing. Abraham having children was an impossible task. Getting out of Egypt was an impossible reality.

And throughout the Old Testament you have story upon story upon story with David and Goliath or Ruth, and right through the Old Testament you've got stories of impossibility that has got to intervene in the impossibility of life.

And maybe you struggle and you're thinking, you know, I'm fed up of this. It's an impossible walk. And I've shared my faith and nobody's interested in becoming a Christian.

It's impossible today for people to come to faith. And you're struggling with that. And you have a vulnerability, you feel a struggle with that, and it does seem overwhelming. Did I put up sychrointines 4-7?

[ 31 : 56 ] Yeah. But because that's the way it is, isn't it? We have this treasure in Jarzai clay that shows that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. That's why things seem so impossible for us so much of the time.

Because it drives us to the one who has the surpassing power to forgive and to change and to transform and to renew and to answer our prayers and to bring people of faith whom we love.

But the three people you've been praying for, for seven or eight years in St. Columbus, it's impossible, isn't it? You're fed up praying for them. Nothing's changed. Keep going. Keep persevering. Keep sharing.

Keep looking for opportunities. Because this God is a God who in fulfilling His promises to deal with this city and give the people a land that He told Abraham 400 years before, was reminding them that His promises always are true.

That's why we're looking at promises on the Wednesday night at the engine room. Because they're always true. He doesn't lie. And the victory He gives is exceedingly above and beyond what we can ask or even imagine.

[ 33 : 00 ] So it's tough truth. I know that. And it's difficult to argue this truth in the society and in the world in which we live. But we do need to mine it.

We do need to work it. We do need to understand it and always bring it through the lens and the prism of Calvary and what Jesus has done for us at Calvary. And in one application of a story, that it surely must be in our lives when the commander of the Lord's army speaks to Joshua.

And Joshua says, you know, are you for us or for our adversaries' adversities? And he says, no, I am the commander of the Lord's army. And the question that we often ask is, I wonder if God's in my side?

And that's not the big question. The big question is, are you on His side? Are you living on His side, on the side of victory, on the side of the defeat of death on the cross at Calvary?

Or are you on the side of Him who gave Himself for you and you say, this is where I stand. And He is who I stand for.

[ 34 : 13 ] In all the difficulties and mysteries and impossibilities of that, because His is the side of victory and love and grace and hope and forgiveness and a future and an identity in Him.

He's a great God and He does make us work to understand Him. So we have to put our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, we ask in prayer that we would understand you better.

We pray that these passages that we read, which are filled with difficulties for us in many ways, that we would accept and believe and be able to argue, not in an argumentative way but in a humble and persuasive way as we see them pointing towards Calvary and how could sin ever be more serious than it requiring the death of God, the God the Son?

What more expensive price could ever be meted out in order to bring justice and mercy together and bring hope?

And forgive us, Lord, in the light of that for treating it cheaply and lightly as if it doesn't matter and if God will just forgive anyway and He couldn't care less.

[ 35 : 33 ] Help us to see that all these Old Testament stories too are pointing just to the weightiness and the brutality and the ugliness and the evil of the human heart and that it will always come to judgment either on Jesus or on ourselves.

That's a solemn thought and one we should do well to weigh and think about this evening. When we think of our lives and we think of our friends who don't know you and when we lack courage and maybe effort and energy to share Jesus and to wrestle with these issues.

So help us, we pray, live in God in our lives and into this week that we've entered for Jesus' sake. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.