

Jericho

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to turn back to Joshua chapter 6 but before we do that I'm going to read the end of Joshua chapter 5. Sorry, I meant to change the reading on the screens and for Corey but if I forgot.

Okay, so the end of chapter 5 which is quite important at the beginning of chapter 6. Remember the story of Jericho in our morning worship we're looking at children's Bible stories and kind of giving them, I was going to say a makeover, that's not the word I was looking for.

But we're looking at them again from a slightly different angle maybe and it's the story of the walls of Jericho coming tumbling down. I could sing a song to you at this point but you wouldn't want me to but I'm sure many of you know a children's Bible song about the walls of Jericho coming tumbling down.

But at the end of chapter 5 we have this amazing introduction to the story in verse 13. When Joshua was by Jericho he lifted up his eyes and looked and behold a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand.

Joshua went to him and said to him, are you for us or are for our adversaries? And he said, no, but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come. Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, why does my Lord say to his servant, what does my Lord say to his servant?

[1 : 23] And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, take off your sandals from your feet for the place you are standing is holy. And Joshua did so. So as we've been looking at these Bible stories thus far and right forward towards Christmas time it will be from the Old Testament.

There is one central theme in them and there is one central theme actually in the whole Bible. God, it's a very simple theme. And right from the beginning to the end of the Bible God is absolutely central.

And so whenever we worship together or whenever we read the word or whenever we think about spiritual realities, God needs to be absolutely at the center of our thinking.

And what we think of God therefore is very important and the Bible is there to reveal God to us and reveal our need for God in our lives. And we often speak to God as believers.

And also as unbelievers people speak to God or wrestle at some levels with God. And I think often we begin our dialogue with God asking the wrong question.

[2 : 39] We come to God from the wrong vantage point. And so what we have in the Bible is we find the Bible challenges us, exposes us and encourages, commands us to turn from the way we think about God naturally and look at Him from His own revelation.

Even Joshua did it here. When he met with the commander of the Lord's army who we see and I'll say a little bit more about this later. There's clearly a revelation of God here and he asks the wrong question.

He says, are you for us? Are you against us? Are you for us or are you for our enemy? And very often we ask the same question of God in our lives when we think about and we think God, are you in my side?

Are you for me? Or are you for others? Are you actually against me in my thinking? And often that question stems from us being at the very center. Is God with me in my life or is He an enemy to me?

Is He someone who's against me? God, are you on my team? Do you stand beside me or am I going to have to ditch you because you're old fashioned and I can't simply agree with your revelation of yourself which is so barbaric in the story.

[4 : 00] I can't possibly believe in that kind. I want and understand a God of love and gentleness and grace and forgiveness. This is barbaric nonsense that we have in this story, even if it is a children's story from the Bible.

And so often we come to God with a me-centric question. God, are you for me? Are you in my side? Do you understand me and who I am so that everything kind of revolves around me?

It's amazing isn't it, in this world of seven billion people we can all ask that same question of God.

God, are you for me? Are you going to be in my back pocket?

And yet the claim of the Bible is to exclusive truth and also to a God-centric universe. Not a me-centric universe, but a God-centric one.

That is a huge, a huge, a massive change for us to think about because by nature we all think, maybe not scientifically and maybe not philosophically, but in our own thing we all think we're the centre of our own universe in many ways, don't we?

[5 : 10] And yet what we have in the Word is the author of creation, God. The God who authors and who creates goodness and is goodness in humanity and good is in and is his being.

Love, morality, justice. This God who always exists as a being, who never began, who never had to be born, who has no start, no finish, no edge, no limitation.

The one to whom we are accountable because we're made in His image, each one of us, every single one accountable to this living God. And He communicates with us.

In love He communicates with us and He changes the question, doesn't He? He changes the question. He even does it here. The commander of the Lord's army says, Are you with me or are against me? And He says, No, I'm the commander of the Lord's army.

Joshua bows down in worship. That's why we know it's God. He worships and the commander of the Lord's army doesn't stop this worship. And it's an awesome revelation. There's an Old Testament theophany here of God, a revelation of God revealed in the person of this commander of the Lord's army to Joshua.

[6 : 27] And it changes everything, doesn't it? When Joshua meets with God in this remarkable way, it leads Joshua to reverential worship. And that's the one thing nobody here, even though we're gathered for worship, is the one thing none of us here can do naturally.

None of us can worship God. It's the reason Jesus came. Jesus came to redeem us to deal with our disordered lives and our disordered worship, as Corrie was speaking about last week, which has led to spiritual death.

So we worship everything and everyone except the living God. We're spiritually dead by nature to Him. And that death denies God His rightful question.

It leaves us under His just and fair judgment. So that we naturally, without grace, recoil from worship, we misunderstand God and sin.

And we recognize that the chaos of our disordered lives, this world of evil and hatred, is because we have not given God His rightful place.

[7 : 39] We see goodness and beauty and joy and love and justice in this world, and it hints at the revelation of God. It hints at something better, it hints at something urgent that we need to know the living God.

And so these Old Testament stories are about God and about His character and about His revelation. Now this is a particularly difficult story. And it doesn't fit, this whole concept of destruction, it really doesn't fit in well with our 21st century's expectation of God and of who we are and of how civilized we are.

God has no right to do this. God has no right to judge the way He does. And can I just throw this out before we look at the story? It seems that society would be absolutely, today's society would be absolutely outraged by this story and by the apparent genocide that happens in this story.

And yet at the same time, the society in which we live seems to feel it's their right, and their right to destroy the lives of millions of unborn children.

Those innocents that are the most vulnerable, that have no protection, that have the greatest potential, that is unrealized in this world, and it is done as a right.

[9 : 16] It is done as something absolutely civilized. And there's a searing irony there that a society which will allow such destruction will also at the same time hold its hands out in horror against the God of justice and the God of love.

So let's look at this account of Jericho. It can be disentangled from the Bible's central theme. It can be isolated, it is all part of the revelation of God, nor can it be argued away.

There's two things I want to say about this story. One is God's destruction, and one is God's victory. And then ask the question, how do we know God? What does this tell us about God in our own lives and for today?

God's destruction, clearly this is a story that challenges us at the very greatest level. In verse 21 of these words, then they devoted all in the city of destruction, men and women, young and old oxen, sheep, donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

It's hard reading. It's tough to look at. It's tough to see this description. What can we say about it? With their sophisticated 21st century sensitivities.

[10:33] Well, we recognize that what is happening here is not random or indiscriminate. It's not just a capricious God throwing out the dummy and being raging and angry.

It's not racial genocide. It is not ethnic genocide that we have here. He has clearly stayed his judgment from much of the nations of the world around at this time.

He has limited it to this specific situation. And his judgment is not only meted out here on the Kenanites, but in other places it's also meted out on his own people, the Israelites.

And we see a greater judgment and a greater responsibility being poured out here. It's a spiritual judgment and particularly against evil in its vilest form.

The Kenanite people as represented by the people of Jericho here had snowballed their love for destruction and evil into the vilest forms.

[11:41] And it was an incredibly brutal and wicked nation where parents offered up their children for human sacrifice. It was a particularly violent city.

God's judgment here wasn't capricious. In Genesis 15 and 16, have we got that for the screen? No. Okay, Genesis 15 and verse 16 has God making a covenant with Abraham and he says in verse 16 when he speaks about the Amorites, the people of Kenan.

And they shall come back here in the fourth generation for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. 400 years before God had said, I'm giving this people 400 years to turn to repent.

Their wickedness is not yet full. They had many opportunities to turn to God. They knew if you read some of the earlier chapters about Rahab and the way she spoke about the city, they had talked about, they discussed the people of God.

They discussed the Lord's revelation and his release of the people from slavery. They discussed his power that he was the God of heaven and earth and yet they knew about his redemption.

[12:54] But they would rather tremble within the city and take their chance with the power that they trusted in themselves, all except Rahab and their Rahab's family.

It was an irrational rejection of the living God by this time. And they lived in what was the pinnacle of human strength. It was a huge fortified city with double walls.

It was impregnable. It was like the Titanic of cities of its day to go backwards with an illustration.

And it was completely safe and they felt they could at least resist the Israelites who were quite small and insignificant in comparison.

But they rebelled consistently against the living God. They would not have him rule over them. And they were devoted therefore for destruction. And I believe for some it would have been a temporal destruction.

That is death not necessarily meaning eternal judgment. I think particularly for the children who may well have been the lords.

[14:08] The wider perspective of this destruction was as a warning to the wider people. It was a recognition that evil couldn't be allowed to flourish because the potential for darkness and bleakness was unlimited.

It would have been a catastrophic liaison for God's people to live with this people of Jericho and to fuse their lives with lives that were utterly and completely dark and rebellious against God.

And it was a recognition that the land was being reclaimed from the powers of darkness and given to God who was the one who had promised it.

So we see God's destruction. We'll come back to that briefly at the end. We also see here in this story God's victory. Verse 2, we have these words, the Lord said to Joshua, See, I have given Jericho into your hand with its king and mighty men of Valar.

So the Israelites were used to work this victory, but it was God who worked in and through them. This was clearly an act of God. This was not a freak militaristic victory for a small people against a great people, AKA David and Goliath, although there are many similarities.

[15 : 28] This was God at work here on bringing victory. There were impossible odds. It was an impregnable fortress. Israel didn't have a mighty army, but God was here.

The commander of the Lord's army in verse 14, 15 of the previous chapter speaks. He comes in judgment here. And he is working a strategic victory here as a gateway city to the promised land. The victory is assured. Before it happens, the victory is assured. God says, I have given Jericho into your hands. And the strategy is not militaristic in human terms.

So we have the fighting men of God, the Israelites, at the beginning and at the end. Then you've got the priests with the trumpets. And in the middle of all of it, you've got the Ark of the Covenant, which is the symbol of God's presence.

And within this, the military men are silent. It's the priests of God who blow the trumpet, and the ark is prominent.

[16 : 40] It goes round the city once every day. Eight times it's mentioned in this chapter, the Ark of the Lord. The Ark of the Lord, the Ark of the Lord. This great symbol of God's presence among the people.

And it seems a strange thing, one day after another, once round the city, and then stopping. And the trumpets, which sound both for worship and for war.

And the number seven, which biblically and in God's numerology is a significant number, one that speaks of perfection. And then on the last day of the day of rest, seven times seven, where the people rest, as it were, on that day, recognizing that they are to trust in God.

And lastly, the shout that involves all the people. That's all they do. They simply shout. And these astonishing walls collapse miraculously. And there is very strong archaeological evidence today that that is the case.

And the people go in and they complete their work. This is God's victory. And within that, there is this huge slice of mercy for Rahab, the prostitute.

[17 : 58] Rahab, the prostitute who had put her hope and trust in God, unlike the rest of her people. She recognizes where salvation will come from.

Read what she says if you have time in chapter three, what she says to the spies. She recognizes who the Lord is and she recognizes Him as the God of heaven and earth. She wasn't asking the question of God, who are you?

Are you on my side? She says, I need to be on His side for who He is. And she trusts against all the odds she trusts in Him and she's rescued.

She's rescued her and all her family and Rahab, the prostitute. Is channeled into the genealogy of Jesus.

She's the mother of Boaz. Remember Boaz who we looked at in the life of Ruth? She becomes one who reminds us that all of the Old Testament stories have this element of protection of the seed of the woman.

[19 : 03] That it's promised in Genesis 3 that we'll go right through to the birth of Jesus and Rahab is part of that. And it's great that she, like so many of the others in the Old Testament, are unlikely recipients of grace.

They are the kind of people that society would have chosen, not the good upright moral people, but those that God had chosen not by merit, but because they simply trusted in the word that God had said.

So we've got this remarkable story. So children's Bible story, walls of Jericho come tumbling down. We struggle with it or maybe we simply don't think about it.

But what is it that it speaks to us about God? What is it for your life as you leave here today? What about for your life as you sit in here today and your understanding of God and your understanding of what is centric in your universe?

What matters and what is significant? What is it that it says to us? We remember that this is not the final revelation of God, don't we? The Old Testament progressively reveals what God is doing till we get to the pinnacle of Jesus Christ.

[20 : 22] This is a piece of the whole. But what do we, what are we told? Well, four things very briefly. Justice on His terms is inescapable.

Okay? Justice on His terms is inescapable. Now, we all want justice, don't we? And we all get swept up in our longing for evil to be destroyed.

And we have our own concept of heaven which will be free of badness and evil and death and tears. But sometimes it's on our terms. But yet the reality is that justice on His terms is inescapable if we understand and believe who God is.

And if He is God at all, rather than the one that might we pull out of our back pocket when we need a genie. God is the standard. God is the measuring line.

And God is the one to whom we are accountable and we all fall short. He makes the call. And He is the one who judges and death, or physical death, is a representative, is part of the spiritual death that stops us naturally from worshiping Him and giving Him His rightful place.

[21 : 43] How can we be sure of that? Doesn't that sound horribly judgmental and desperately bleak and dark? How can we be sure that justice on His terms is inescapable?

Because of Christ. Because of the cross. Christ isn't simply for us a nice, good example of how to live. Christ is the one who Himself died in order that our sentence could be remitted.

God faced death. You know we say, well God's terrible life, capricious, He's evil, He's wicked. He kills and destroys lives. And yet we can't get away from this reality that He Himself took that death. He Himself is the recipient of His own justice, or the one who goes into the dock Himself, because He sees we can't put it right ourselves. Rachel, Rehab, sorry, Rehab was singing Rachel, the hymn, tune, but Rehab is redeemed because of what Jesus was going to do.

Everyone who comes to faith, everyone who knows the grace of God is in that place because of the fact that Jesus Christ died in our place. God the Father at that point was silent, God the Son shouts and cries out, why?

[23 : 11] But it is God's love that drives Him to provide the only answer to inescapable justice. The one that He takes our death, our just judgment on Himself, we sing about it.

We understand it, we wear crosses because it speaks about this inescapable reality of a just God and a merciful God.

That is why, can I say to you this morning, knowing God as He reveals Himself absolutely matters. It's not just a matter of opinion, a swinging of ideas here and there.

How He reveals Himself, which is clear throughout Scripture on these important matters, is so significant. It matters what you do with Him. It matters how you wrestle with Him.

It matters that you experience His overwhelming love for you and that He would do this on your behalf.

[24 : 12] Because He rose from the dead victorious, justice is mixed in with His victory, but He will return in judgment. Romans chapter 2 at verse 5 tells us that, oh here we are, but because of your hard and impenitent heart, you're storing up wrath for yourself.

On the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed, His righteous judgment, those who will not turn, those who will not recognise His revelation of Himself.

What a huge challenge that is for us. Huge challenge that justice is on His terms. Our justice at best is only ever shadowy.

But also secondly, His mercy is incompatible. His mercy is incompatible. And what He asks you today to do, old Christian or young Christian or not a Christian, is to trust in His love, to trust in His commitment and what He has done for us, that He has rescued redeemed all who come to Him by faith.

And we are asked to trust Him and recognise Him for who He is. It isn't for us about how good we think we are. It turns that, doesn't it? Doesn't it? On its head.

[25 : 34] It doesn't matter how bad we are. That's quite good to be honest. A rebellion is quite nice because you probably know your own heart better sometimes.

When you compare yourself with others and think, I'm rubbish. But where we need to get to is where we all get to that place where we say, lead before God, His outstanding forgiveness and love. Accept Him.

Simply, that's what He says. Oh, you're all really intellectual. You're all really bright. You wrestle with philosophical realities. You're at university, some of you are at the top of the cream of society's intelligentsia.

But I'm asking you to accept His truth like a child. Not in a childish way, but in a childlike way, recognising He paid it all.

So you might know forgiveness, life and an unimaginably great heaven. Second thing, His mercy is incomparable. Unmatched.

[26 : 40] Nothing and nobody can touch it. It's great. It's brilliant. Thirdly, the obedience of faith is inescapable. Hebrews 11, I went out, did you read that, Corey?

Yeah, I went out to Sunday School, our kids church. Hebrews 11 links what happens in Joshua, in Jericho to faith, the great faith chapter 11 of Hebrews. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.

By faith Rahab the procedure did not perish. Those who are disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And this story is one of obedience.

You see, when we've become recipients of His love and of His grace, to obey is the unqualified response. Now, it's often not easy.

The challenge of grace isn't easy. The challenge for the Israelites wasn't easy to obey. It was very difficult. But the challenge of grace, the challenge of forgiveness, the challenge of repentance, the challenge of humility, the challenge of depending on the spirit of God is not easy.

[27 : 46] It often requires patience, silence, opposition, difficult associations, but it's inescapable.

Because with that obedience comes deeper faith. It's a spiral upwards, as it were, not a spiral downwards. As we obey because we love, then our faith grows.

And as our faith grows, so we receive His blessings more. Simply because we are living in that place of grateful obedience.

It's not obedience to make ourselves right. It's out of gratitude to what He has done. It's not quid pro quo. We don't say, okay, God, if you give me blessings, if you give me my answered prayers, I'll be more obedient.

It's not that way round. It's that simple trust and obedience, even when we don't necessarily want to or understand, it's inescapable. And lastly, in terms of responding to what we have here for ourselves, victory in Him is unassailable.

[29 : 03] And we see that. It's important that the commander of the Lord's army is at the beginning of this. And it's important that he makes the promise before anything happens that he has given Jericho to the people of God here.

The promise is sure. And that is a shadow of what we have in the promises of God for us in Jesus Christ. As we come to Him by faith, as we fall at His feet and worship Him for who He is, and entrust our lives to Him forgiveness, and life is guaranteed.

Why? There's a great seal. It's the great seal of the resurrection, isn't it? It's a huge, big seal on all that God promises because His work has been completed and God is happy with what has happened.

And He has defeated sin and the grave and evil and death and will one day destroy it. Victory is guaranteed. I know it doesn't seem like that in 21st century Scotland.

And it doesn't seem that God is... Jesus is going to come back one day and usher in the new heavens and the new earth. And it doesn't seem that justice will be done. But that is where faith comes in, that we believe in His promises, that Satan is already defeated and will be destroyed.

[30 : 23] When Jesus in Revelation 22 says, I will wipe away every tear, do you believe Him? Or is He lying? Or is it fanciful?

Or is it based on the promise that His word is true? Now today we face spiritual battles. We're not asked, thank God, to do anything in the way that there's the likes we're to do, who were in that temporary period, instruments of God's judgment, nothing like that.

That has finished God, accepts the Kenanite today by grace, and did so in the New Testament. But we do face a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6.12 tells us that, that we face a battle for we don't wrestle against flesh and blood.

You know this verse. But against the rulers, authorities, cosmic power, present darkness, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. We have a spiritual battle. We're all in that spiritual battle.

And yet the odds do seem stacked against us, don't they? We feel very small and unimportant. An unbelief seems so impregnable today. How many years have been praying for our three friends?

[31 : 31] How many years have you been praying for your three friends? How many years have we done seven years of prayer? And the unbelief seems impregnable. People don't seem to be coming to faith as we would long for.

And yet we have victory in Him to move forward. You as a Christian, we as a church. We move forward in faith. We can't stand still because the gates of hell will not prevail against us.

You know we look at that picture and we often think that that's a picture of hell attacking the church. Of Satan attacking and Christ kind of defending.

That's not the picture. The picture is the gates of hell. Gates of hell are being stormed by Jesus Christ and by His victory. He's on the defensive and He will not prevail.

It will be destroyed and we are either safe in Jesus Christ or we are exposed and under His judgment. It matters. The gospel will crush all unbelief and rebellion against Him.

[32 : 35] Evil will not have its way. There will be a judgment. Where do you stand today? Where do you stand before the living God? It matters. It really matters as we battle with our hearts, as we have unbelieving friends, as maybe you today are not a Christian and think, well, yeah, Derek, I've heard it all before.

It's about years. I'm going to start crying now. And we'll wait till that's over and then we'll go home and we'll have roast dinner. And that'll be fine again. And we marvelously can move to put the importance of the love of Christ away from our hearts.

The victory in Him is unassailable. Can I give you just a little personal church stroke, personal insight as we finish about God's victory and God doing what He has promised to do?

He sees many people in the city. We got to the stage with Cornerstone. We had a Thanksgiving service last week. We got to the stage at Cornerstone. Where are we going to progress the work here? We have no building in Morningside.

We can't provide worship in a building because they're far too expensive. How will we do it? The old schoolhouse was given to us. And I was standing in here one day and I was looking around at the pews.

[33 : 56] We'll never be able to afford to get this church renovated. We'll only be able to do the basics. And I got a phone call as I was thinking that from Rod across in the office saying, you've just received £100,000 from a government fund to do the roof.

The work could progress. We got to the stage where in Est Valley, we had to say to Tom, Tom, you're the assistant here. We can't afford to let you go full-time in Est Valley. We don't have the money. We can't do it.

That week, we had a Skype phone call from a church in America that was willing to give \$50,000 a year for five years to the work of the Gospel in Est Valley, which allowed us to progress.

Neil McMillan and myself sat with Ali Sol, who started in Harrington last week kind of formally, with six days to go. And we said to Ali, Ali, we don't have any money for this work.

You need, by the day of your licensing, if we don't have the money, and you will need to go and look for a congregation somewhere else, we can't keep you waiting.

[35 : 00] This is where it's got to. In that week, we got all the money we needed to allow him to be funded and housed for the first year, and since then, we've had year two, and hopefully year three as well.

Now, that's only money. That's nothing. But we need to believe that God's provision, not only for these things, but for the many people that we are praying for and wrestling for and longing to come to faith.

He is the one who breaks down the impregnable walls of unbelief. He's the one that brings people to life. He has pushed us forward all the way to be church planting, because I do believe he wants these churches to be filled with souls who come to know Him and love Him, as those who have given their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what question are you asking about God today? Are you asking the right ones? God, are you on my side?

Or do you recognize who He is? Because the only true response today to the living God is worship. Is that we bow our knee and worship the living God.

[36 : 16] Do you worship the living God in your heart? I'm not speaking about the public worship, although that's a very important expression. I'm asking, can you say Jesus Christ is your Lord?

Because it is the only true response to the living God. Let's bow our heads before we sing.

Father in heaven, forgive us for at best only seeing through a glass of darkly as it were. We see so little of who you are. We see so little of your grandeur, of your majesty, of your power and of your glory.

We so often have you in a cage, so often make you small. We so often maybe focus on your justice without focusing on your outstanding mercy.

Sometimes we focus on your mercy without really having any grounding on why it matters, because we recoil from your justice. Forgive us for not understanding you better.

[37 : 19] Forgive us for not being more urgent in our understanding of simply enjoying you. Help us to recognize that your redemption is full and free and utterly enjoyable, and a reason for praise and worship and adoration.

Reorder our loves, we pray. Help us to love you from the inside as we recognize the impossibility of that. But as we come to you as the one who does the impossible for us, may we entrust our lives to you.

And our circumstances, Lord, today might be awful, might be bleak and grim, might make us question if there is a God, may we look to Calvary and that finished reality and the resurrection that we note today by our worship on this resurrection morning, and may our circumstances not define who we are, but may we find truth in Jesus Christ and redemption and freedom and hope and joy. Amen.