

“Invading Enemy Territory”

Joshua 6

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If you are not invading the enemy's territory don't anticipate God's intervention.

Joshua 6

Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."

So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." And he ordered the people, "Advance! March around the city, with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD..."

They did this for six days. On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!... When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city... Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD's house... At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: "Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:

"At the cost of his firstborn son
will he lay its foundations;
at the cost of his youngest

will he set up its gates."

So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land."

I don't think any other event recorded in the Bible is better known than this one – "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho".

In spite of that song, who was the primary character in this event, or in other words who really fought the battle of Jericho? God!

And what did Joshua and the Israelites contribute to the event? Trusting obedience.

I think the main lesson of Joshua 6 is that when we invade the enemy's territory in dependence on God, we can expect God's intervention to be sufficient to meet the need.

But the corollary, and the one on which I am focusing today, is what I stated earlier: **If you're not invading enemy territory don't anticipate God's intervention.**

We've just read how Joshua responded to God's commission to invade the enemy's territory, but I want, now, to describe a different response.

I want you to assume with me that it wasn't ancient Israel that was responding, but it was a group of all-too-typical 21st century American evangelicals in Israel's situation.

There we were in Gilgal, having just crossed the Jordan River.

We got the message about possessing the land and particularly about taking the city of Jericho but upon reflection we thought that was a bit too militant, too "Crusaderish".

Instead, we thought a far better plan was to settle down at Gilgal.

We'd had a wonderful experience of God's powerful presence in the crossing of the Jordan **and** this was a very fertile area in which take up residence.

After all there was enough land here and on the west side of the Jordan. We didn't need Canaan, we could make a living here.

In fact if we did it right we could enjoy life and raise our families.

So instead of invading Jericho, instead of possessing the land, we built our own city **and** we built a bridge across the Jordan as well.

The Caravan traders for centuries had traveled from Egypt to the Far East along a route that took them on the east side of the Jordan.

If we were astute we could become middlemen between the trade caravans and the cities of Canaan to the west.

We didn't need to **invade** the land when we could **accommodate** it.

We would build a business relationship with Jericho.

And to enhance that we would send and receive theatre troupes and athletic teams to build better understanding between our communities.

No, we hadn't forgotten about our religion.

We built a Tabernacle and we put the Ark of the Covenant in it.

Every Saturday we went to worship when it didn't interfere with the tourist business we'd built up on the Dead Sea or the skiing trips to Mt Hermon.

The sermons and Bible lessons all eventually focused on how we could be more successful in interpersonal relationships or overcome disappointment or stress or be more positive about ourselves and others.

When we worshipped we also thanked God for giving us so much.

We loved the land on which we lived and we were truly grateful for the way our businesses had prospered.

And so we prayed that God would continue to bless us with health and prosperity and oh yes we gave to charity so that God would think kindly of us.

Our most intense prayers were when a loved one or we got sick or when business wasn't as profitable as it had been.

I can't remember the last time we prayed about Jericho except that one time when we thought they were a threat to us.

For a while we were worried about our children marrying the children of Jericho and so we prayed that our kids would remain faithful but we got over that when we discovered that the people of Jericho believed in a god too.

Never mind that wasn't the same God – at least they weren't atheists.

Now our kids and theirs intermarry quite often – so much so that no one notices any longer.

Within a very short time we had completely forgotten the original command to possess the Promised Land.

We had a land of our own and we were quite happy.

But in spite of our general good health and middle-class socio-economic status, some eventually developed emotional issues – they weren't as satisfied with life as they thought we should be.

A mental health industry grew up attempting to help us **find ourselves, live at peace with ourselves, to be personally successful, to win over worry and depression, and generally how to feel better.**

But most of us had learned that if we worked hard, “played our cards right”, and had a little bit of luck we could get along just fine.

That bit of satire on American evangelicalism isn't likely to win a Pulitzer Prize in literature but I think it makes the point.

Remember the lesson of Joshua 6: **When we invade the enemy's territory in dependence on God, we can expect the intervention of our God sufficient to meet the need.**

And the corollary: **If you're not invading enemy territory don't anticipate God's intervention.**

I think it can fairly easily be demonstrated from Scripture that **God had a claim on the lives of the people of Israel.**

In other words, **he chose them** to be his own **for a purpose.** They were a commissioned people – commissioned to God's purpose, God's mission in the world.

And that mission was not only to inherit the Promised Land but also for them to use that land to be a blessing to the rest of the world.

2000 years before Christ God said it this way to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people:

Genesis 12:2-3 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;.. and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

And then 500 years later, the Lord said to Joshua 1:2-6 "Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses... "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

But that mission was still only part of the larger one:

Genesis 12:3 "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Israel was a commissioned people and the promise of God's powerful presence had to do with his people following him in accomplishing his purposes in the world. Israel at Gilgal was God's beachhead into reclaiming enemy territory.

God not only had a claim on Israel's life but he also has a claim on ours.

We too are a commissioned people.

"But you are a chosen people," the Apostle Peter wrote, "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light... Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:9,12)

Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Church and **we, individually** as part of the church, are God's beachhead into enemy territory to **reclaim** it for God.

In NT terminology the Kingdom of God has invaded the kingdom of the world.

In Webster's dictionary "kingdom" is defined in three ways. One, as a **place** over which a king rules – e.g. "The United Kingdom." That's how we usually think of a kingdom.

But "kingdom" is also defined in "Webster" as the **people** over which a king rules.

And it is also defined as the **position or rank or power of a king.**

Or as I would say it, "The kingdom is the king's reign and authority."

So the "Kingdom of heaven" is not first of all a place but is God's authority, his right to rule.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, "Seek first his (God's) kingdom."

Are we being asked to seek heaven?

No, we are being asked to desire God's sovereign rule in our lives and the world.

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," are we asking for heaven to come?

No. As the prayer goes on, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

We see that God's kingdom is his rule, his authority, as sovereign king.

Here's another way of understanding it:

The Bible refers to "this age" and "the age to come".

We understand “this age” to mean the one in which we presently live and “the age to come” as the one ushered in when Jesus comes again.

We also think of “this age” as being ruled by sin and death (the kingdom of this world) and “the age to come” as being ruled by God – the “kingdom of heaven”.

But what Jesus came announcing was the good news that God’s kingdom of the future has reached back into this age.

Jesus announced that with his first coming, the Kingdom of God had come – it was starting.

And we are God’s means for brining his kingdom to completion.

As Israel must have felt weak and few in the face of the fortified cities and well-equipped armies of Canaan, **so we** may feel weak and few in the face of a world that chases other gods.

But Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of heaven as it is otherwise known) may start out looking small but it is so powerful by God’s intervention that it will eventually take over.

Matthew 13:31-33 ““The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed... Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.” **He told them still another parable:** “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

And eventually as God said it in Revelation 11:15 “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

The kingdom of the world is the territory we are commissioned to invade.

But Jesus makes it very clear that the “territory” is not geography but the hearts and lives of people.

And we are to think of that “territory”, the hearts and lives of people in two ways:

First there is the “territory” within us.

Being “born again” is God’s beachhead into our hearts and lives.

But within us there is still much unclaimed “territory” – many habits, ways of thinking, improper values, and ways of acting that need to be rooted out and replaced with the likeness of Christ.

The Apostle Paul described it this way:

To the Galatians 4:8-9, 19 “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?... My dear children...I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you

To the Ephesians 4:13 “...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

To the Colossians 3:5-10 “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.... since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

The enemy still has powerful influence in our lives and part of reclaiming that “territory” is invading those areas of our lives that are not like Christ and bringing them into captivity to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5 “and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Those “walls” have to come down!

Paul described it this way in Romans 7:21-23 “When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another (powerful influence) at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of...sin at work within (me).”

Are we invading that territory within – those attitudes and actions that are unlike Jesus?

Are we waging war against the enemies claims on our lives?

Remember the corollary lesson of Joshua 6: If you are not invading the enemy’s territory don’t anticipate God’s intervention.

But the “territory” is not only within us as believers, the “territory” is also other people - all those for whom Christ died, who have not yet responded to his grace.

But the Apostle John makes it clear that reclaiming them won’t be easy:

1 John 5:19 “...the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

As does Paul: Ephesians 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

1 Corinthians 2:13 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Jesus said it this way in John 3:5-6 “Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

No one can become a Christian unless the “walls” come down.

And God showed Joshua and us that **they come down by his intervention through us.**

Are we invading enemy “territory”?

Remember the corollary lesson of Joshua 6: If you never invade the enemy’s territory you won’t need God’s help.

Last week’s lesson from Joshua 5 was about preparing to do battle. I think I minimized the significance of the text by referring only to psychological issues in our lives – how knowing God’s presence can help us face the difficulties of life.

In context, the circumcision and Passover, of Joshua 5, were to prepare Israel **to do battle** – to invade enemy territory – to **reclaim** what belongs to God.

Whenever I study a text for preaching, I think in terms of how it will relate to us.

And the great temptation is to “psychologize” everything; to think of how it will minister peace to our overwrought Psyches; how it will help us through the next emotionally difficult time.

But have you ever noticed in reading about war that no one is particularly concerned about how soldiers FEEL?

The commander doesn’t stop to see if his troops are **emotionally** okay.

They don’t have counseling sessions on a battlefield.

In our culture, even our evangelical sub-culture, it has become all about “us.”

The issue for many sermons, even many Bible studies, and much counseling is how does it affect me, will I feel better or more capable of coping after I hear what you have to say.

The great life goals for many of us continue to be what Francis Schaeffer said it was 25 years ago – **personal** peace and **affluence**.

We want to feel good about ourselves, to have peace of mind and to have sufficient financial means to do much of what we want to do when we want to do it.

But it isn’t about “us”; it’ about the Kingdom of God.

The Promised Land was not first of all about Israel but about God's goals for the world.

Israel was to be a means whereby the world would know and worship God.

The Promised Land was not "heaven," it was the staging area for invading the world.

The Christian life is not meant to be "heaven" where all is well emotionally and physically, it is the staging area for invading the kingdom of the world with the Kingdom of God.

We haven't reached heaven yet, we are on a mission.

The "Jericho walls" of our lives are not emotional hurdles over which we must climb to know personal peace.

The "Jericho walls" of our lives are the places the enemy holds that keeps the kingdom of God from advancing, within and without.

And the great lesson of Joshua 6 is that "Jericho" is overcome by God's power.

What are the "Jericho walls" that keep us from seeing the Gospel communicated to every man, woman and child in our community?

What are the "Jericho walls" that keep you and me from experiencing "Christ formed in us"?

What are the "Jericho walls" that keep the Gospel from flowing over the countries of China, India, Pakistan or Iraq?

What are the "Jericho walls" that keep my neighbor from experiencing true peace **with** God?

For a minute, consider the work of our missionaries Wayne and Amy Losey and their daughters.

- God is worthy of the worship of the Shepherd People they are attempting to reach.
- Political and religious systems and spiritual blindness stand between those people and the Gospel.

- “Walls” have to come down if those people are to hear and receive the good news.
- Are we joining them and our other missionaries in “invading” that enemy territory?

But on another front we must understand that the Enemy is clever, he not only fights a defensive battle when we invade, he also fights an offensive one to keep us from invading.

The Enemy of our souls is capable of inflicting physical sickness, emotional turmoil, and even spiritual depression in an attempt to take us out of the battle.

Thus a “Jericho wall” that needs to come down might in fact be a physical illness, an emotional turmoil, or a spiritual depression.

And so we invade that “territory” held by the enemy.
But the goal is not just to be free of emotional and physical difficulties, but it is to be strong enough to engage the enemy and possess the “land”.

A great lesson of Joshua 6 is in how the “walls” came down.

They came down by God’s power released through faith.

The author of Joshua does everything in his literary skill to send the message that it was God who won the battle, not Joshua.

- The announcement of victory came **before** the battle began.
- The presence of God symbolized by **the Ark is prominent** throughout the story.
- The role of the people is spell out as **spiritual preparation and obedience** not military genius or strength.
- And the ridiculous exercise of marching around the city wall tooting horns only makes God’s intervention more obvious.
 - And finally, the storyteller completely minimizes the military’s role in the victory by hardly mentioning the mopping up action that followed the walls’ collapse.

Will we ever get it?

“Walls” come down by the power of God released through faith. One of the great expressions of our faith in God is our prayers.

What do our prayers reflect both about our priorities and our mission in life?

I see and hear dozens of prayer requests each week and I think of many of my own prayers.

And what I see has a lot to do with “us” and little to do with invading enemy territory.

It is very appropriate to pray for the health and material welfare of others.

But I am struck with how few prayers are

- “Jericho wall” prayers,
- how few prayers are storming the gates of hell,
- or how few prayers are about invading enemy territory either within a Christian’s life or the life of a non-Christian about whom we care.

I want to urge us today to get into the battle for the souls of people:

- For your own soul,
- The souls of those you know and love,
- The souls of lost neighbors and co-workers,
- The souls of those our missionaries are attempting to reach on our behalf.
- Pray down the walls of Jericho!

Remember again a lesson of Joshua 6: When we invade the enemy’s territory in dependence on God, we can expect the intervention of our God sufficient to meet the need.

But the corollary on which I have focused today is equally true: If you’re not invading enemy territory don’t anticipate God’s intervention.

Are you engaging the enemy? Are you fighting for “territory”?