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BIG FAITH BIG VICTORY!

Today's Text: Joshua 6; Matt. 17: 14-21

Extracts:

1. **“And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city.... So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city” [Josh. 6: 15-16, 20]**
2. **“Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him [demonic spirit] out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” [Matt. 17: 19-20]**

The big news these days is America's preparation for war with Iraq. Massive troops and sophisticated military hardware are being moved to positions near and around Iraq to let Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi leaders know that American President George Bush means what he is saying, that he will attack. The rest of us are scared because we believe that America's military might, by air, sea and land, is too much for "poor" Iraq!

It was the direct opposite when Joshua and his troops surrounded Jericho about four thousand years ago. The city walls were so thick that were they to fall, the attackers would still be unable to climb over them! What did Joshua and his troops have as weapons? Shields, spears, swords and trumpets! So, how could they break down the walls with such weapons and confront heavily armed enemies inside the city? We do find ourselves in a similar situation. Many of us do not have jobs or bank accounts. Those that have bank accounts have nothing in them. Yet, the bills do not stop pouring in. In fact, creditors get more vicious when you are really down! Where does one find any respite: at school, on the job, in business, in love and marriage, in the ministry, in sickness or health, in retirement? With increasing wickedness in the world and fear of terrorist attacks, the worry list has become endless.

What do we fall back on? George Bush believes in America's military might but he cannot predict the outcome of the war, if it ever comes. Joshua and his troops believed in their God and they knew that they would win! Let us find out in today's lesson what made them so sure.

1. Background

Moses was dead and Joshua had been anointed to succeed him. The task of leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land and apportioning it to them fell on Joshua. As they approached the Jordan River, God spoke to Joshua, and assured him that “every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.” He promised to be with him as He had been with Moses. God assured Joshua that, provided he and his people did not allow “this book of the law” to “depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein,” He would “make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” [**Josh. 1: 1-8**]. The then “book of the law” consisted of Genesis to Deuteronomy, recorded by Moses and handed over to the priests and Levites to keep with the ark of the covenant of the Lord [**Deut. 31: 24-26**]. For us, the modern equivalent of the “book of the law” is the Holy Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Jericho represented a major challenge. Located near the Jordan River at the point where the people of Israel would make their entry into the new land, Joshua’s failure there could demoralize them. Joshua sent two spies to investigate the city, presumably to assist him to plan his military strategy. Where else could the spies stay, except in a harlot’s house, which was one of the few public places for strangers to lodge. Nevertheless, the king of Jericho found out about them but with the help of the harlot, Rahab, the two spies escaped unhurt and brought a faith-filled message back to Joshua: “Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the lands; for *even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us*” [**Josh. 2: 1-24**]. That report was based on what Rahab had told them about her people, saying:

I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath
[**Josh. 2: 9-11**]

Certainly, that message strengthened Joshua that the Lord had begun to perform what He had promised. Armed with that courage, and *on the Lord’s clear instructions*, Joshua organized the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. As soon as the *soles of the feet of the priests* that bore the ark of the Lord touched the waters of the river, a dry path was made for the people to cross on dry ground! [**Josh. 3: 1-17**]. The Canaanites could not believe their eyes and “their heart

melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel” [Josh. 5: 1].

2. It’s action time!

For forty long years, God had fed the children of Israel on *manna* from heaven but they were neither malnourished nor obese. However, as soon as they crossed the Jordan River and ate ripe corn as part of their first Passover celebration, *manna* stopped falling. They now had to fend for themselves, presumably as added pressure on them to acquire territory for their farmlands. Any way, they would have to tackle formidable Jericho as their first battle!

When God fights for us, He requires our cooperation in the form of faith in Him and doing what He asks us to do. To confirm His physical presence among the people of Israel, God opened Joshua’s eyes to see and meet the “captain of the host of the Lord” that had led God’s angels to the battle of Jericho [Josh. 5:13-15]. Even with such clear evidence of God’s love and mercy, many of us would still not believe!

3. How big is your faith?

As we shall soon show, it takes *big faith* to obtain big victories. Jesus once fell asleep on a boat as the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly, there was a great storm and the little ship was about to sink. The disciples woke Him up and asked Him in a hysterical tone, “Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” After He had stilled the winds, He turned to them and asked in turn, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have *no faith*?” [Mk 4: 35-40]. On another occasion, a centurion, a Roman officer, came to Jesus to ask for healing for his sick servant. Jesus offered to go with him to his home but he said that that was not necessary, saying, “Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.” When Jesus heard that, He marvelled and told His disciples, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so *great faith*, no, not in Israel” [Matt. 8: 5-10].

That suggests that faith level can range between “none” and “great,” and in the words of Jesus, “According to your faith be it unto you” [Matt. 9:29]. The Bible records that in Jesus Christ’s hometown, Nazareth, “He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” [Matt. 13: 54-58]. So, why should we blame God instead of ourselves when our walk with Him is not producing big victories? The answer lies in the size of our faith and here is how we can find out:

- a) *What are you expecting and who told you about it?*

Faith comes by hearing from God [Rom. 10:17]. In other words, God is the author of faith [Heb. 12:2]. It was God who clearly told Joshua *before the event*, “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king, and the

mighty men of valour” [Josh. 6:2]. Then, He went on to specify how to go about it as follows [vv. 3-5]:

- ✓ *Go around the city once every day for six days and seven times on the seventh day*
- ✓ *Seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns, and blow them on the seventh day after going round the city seven times*
- ✓ *When the people hear the blast of the trumpets, they shall shout very loud and the walls of the city shall fall down flat*
- ✓ *Descend up every man straight before him and take the city*

Unfortunately, many of us go by presumption, influenced largely by our desired outcomes, claiming “God spoke to me in my heart!” A young zoo worker at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) was eaten up by a lion when he jumped into its cage, claiming his faith from reading the story of Daniel! Two young Philippine girls got drowned when they attempted to walk on water like Peter! Unless God has given you clear signals, do not pretend to have received them. That is why faith is defined as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” [Heb. 11:1]. Only God can supply sure substance and evidence that we can rely on. Without that, our faith is on shaky ground and weak.

How do you know that God is speaking to you? The first source should be the Holy Scriptures quickened in your spirit for “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” [2 Tim. 3: 16]. You may be doing your daily devotional reading and suddenly a verse just pops up, addressing the issues you are thinking about. For example, the Lord had sent to me through a prophet in November 1996 to await a certain blessing but He did not specify the time. I went on to do all that I had been instructed, which involved change of location. By May 1998, I had still not received it and I began to seek the Lord’s face again on His promise. That morning, I was reading Isaiah Chapter 66 and suddenly this verse just popped up: “Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God” [v.9]. I felt good thereafter because I knew I had heard from the Lord. By August 1998, the promised blessings began to manifest!

We also hear from the Lord through dreams [Matt. 2:20-24; Matt. 3: 12,13,22], visions [Acts 9: 1-7,10-12; Acts 10: 9-20] and prophecy [Acts 21: 7-14] in accordance with God’s promise that, in the last days, He will pour of His Spirit on all flesh and “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams” [Acts 2: 16-17; Joel 2: 28-32].

b) *Did you believe what you heard and what did you do about it?*

At the time that God told Joshua how to go about the conquest of Jericho, the people had begun to eat earthly foods like us. Therefore, they were not superhuman. Secondly, their ancestors had a good track record of grumbling and disobedience. Most of the generation that entered the Promised Land were under 40 years old, and they had to be circumcised [**Josh. 5: 2-9**]. Therefore, they were young people like most of us today, restless, inquisitive and ambitious. As soon as Joshua heard from the Lord, he went to work, organizing the people as commanded, and they all obeyed him. This was hard work on a hungry stomach for those who liked the new corn better than *manna*! They believed God.

What do most of us do? We filter God's messages. If it will take hard work or a drop in our comfortable living standards, "it is not from my good Lord!" Especially if the message comes through others, I have heard some people respond, "if He meant it for me, He would speak directly to me!" You have forgotten that even the man after God's own heart, David, received God's message about the person to build His temple through prophet Nathan! [**2 Sam. 7: 1-5**]

c) *Did you give up when the going got tough?*

Most times, following God's plan is very hard, and there is always the temptation to pack it up. Friends and foe alike will laugh at you and even want you to examine your sanity! You can be sure that the army and people of Jericho jeered at Joshua and his army. Why were they marching around, dumb? First day, second, third, ..., sixth day. Are these people crazy? Then, on the seventh day, when they were supposed to be too tired already, they started walking faster! They went round seven times. "All that just to get one city?" their ancestors would have grumbled, "Egypt, here I come!" But Joshua and his men persisted.

Persistent faith does not mean that you should not feel pain or fear. Rather it means that you should remain on course, no matter how tough the going is. Jesus bore the pains and insults on His way to Calvary but He overcame all in order to fulfill His Father's plan to redeem us from Satan's clutches. That is why Jesus has become the author and finisher of our faith [**Heb. 12:2**].

d) *What did you get in the end?*

"According to your faith be it unto you," so says Jesus [**Matt. 9:29**]. Joshua and his people did as God had commanded them. They suffered but they persisted. After fulfilling their own end of the deal, they shouted and God took over. "The wall fell down *flat* so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" [**Josh.**

6: 20]. Look at that word, “flat.” Does it mean that the wall fell on its back? If that were so and for a thick wall that was impenetrable, there was no way it would have been possible for each man to go “straight before him.” You recall that Joshua met the captain of the host of the Lord close to Jericho [**Josh. 5: 13-15**]. In his book, *Angels on Assignment*,¹ Charles Hunter has described his encounter with that angel who told him how Jericho fell. When the people were marching round the city, the angels were on top of the wall. Then, when the people shouted on the seventh day, he the captain of the host of the Lord shouted to his colleagues, “push!” As the angels pressed down the wall, it sank into the ground and everywhere became flat! Since the writer of that story did not see the angels at work, all he saw was that the wall fell flat!

Can you imagine what could have happened if Joshua and his people had not persisted to the end? The angels would have been frustrated and God would have been angry and be ready to judge the people for disobedience. Meanwhile, the same people would have turned around to blame God for not fulfilling His promise! That is how most of us wind up in great defeats.

4. Lessons

As somebody has said, faith is like a muscle, which grows with exercise. Rather than grow faith, most of us grow fear, which ultimately paralyses us. The people of Jericho had been paralyzed by fear long before their wall fell. On the other hand, the children of Israel became stronger and bolder as they exercised their faith in God. In the end, they won a major victory. Joshua went on to curse the city, that whoever tried to rebuild it would lose his firstborn while laying the foundation and his last born when building the gates [**Josh. 6:26**]. Several hundreds of years later during the reign of Ahab, Hiel, a Bethelite, rebuilt Jericho. His firstborn, Abiram, died when the foundation was being laid and his last born, Segub, died when the gates were being set [**1 Kgs 16:34**]. Today, Jericho is a small village [er-Riha] lying on the main highway from Jerusalem to Amman, capital of Jordan.

Big faith, big victory!

¹ Charles Hunter, Frances Hunter & Roland Buck, *Angels on Assignment*. The paperback edition (February 2000) is available online from www.amazon.com at US\$9.59 per copy