

When the wisdom of God does not make sense: The fall of Jericho

Joshua 5:13 – 6:27

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Today we come to Joshua 5 and 6. In previous chapters, Israel came to the banks of the flooded Jordan river and miraculously crossed over on dry ground. In chapter 2, we read about Rahab's helping the Israelite spies escape Jericho. Now, Israel is about to come against the city of Jericho.

They camped at a place they called Gilgal and observed their first Passover for the first time in years. The day after their celebration, they ate from the produce of the land. On the following day, after over 40 years, the manna ceased because it was no longer needed.

At this time Jericho was one of the mighty walled cities of Canaan. The Canaanites were strong and fierce people. In Numbers 13:33, the Israelites saw themselves as "grasshoppers" in comparison to the size and strength of the Canaanites. Canaan was known for its pagan, idol worship. We read in Deuteronomy 12:31, 18:9-10, that Canaan was so wicked and depraved that their worship rituals included sexual immorality, sorcery and sacrificing their own children to their gods. In Genesis 15:16, God had told Abraham that his descendants would eventually return to Canaan once the sin of the Canaanites reached its full depravity.

The time had now come. God was keeping a promise to give His people the land. At the same time God was bringing judgment on the people of Canaan for their sin.

In this period in history, walled cities were usually either attacked or a siege would isolate the city in such a way that would eventually starve the people into submission. God's plan was completely different as the Israelites came against the powerful city of Jericho.

In Joshua 5:13, Joshua was near the city of Jericho and was confronted by a man with a drawn sword. Joshua asked if the man was for him or for his enemies. The man then identified himself as, *"the*

commander of the army of the LORD". In response Joshua, an experienced warrior and leader of Israel, bowed down with his face to the ground.

The LORD told Joshua of how He had already given Jericho into his hand. Joshua was to have the people and the men of war march around the city of Jericho one time each day for six days in a row. Behind the men of war would march seven priests, each carrying trumpets made from rams' horns. Behind them would come priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant.

On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. At the end of the seventh time, the priests were to blow the trumpets and all the people were to shout. The walls would then fall down. It was a simple plan, but quite out of the ordinary.

Joshua had seen the commander of the Lord's army. That would bolster one's confidence, but imagine you were Joshua and now had to pass these instructions on to the people, who had not seen the commander of the Lord's army. They were facing a fierce people who lived in a fortified city, and they were going to do nothing more than march around it and blow horns and shout. Would the people believe Joshua? What would you have done if you were Joshua?

At this point it would help to stop and look back at Joshua's spiritual pilgrimage. Joshua was not new to the faith. Joshua had been the assistant of Moses for many years. He had seen God's pillars of cloud and fire in the wilderness as Israel followed God. He had been used by God to lead Israel to many victories in battle. He had sought God alongside Moses. He had participated in the crossing of the Red Sea. He had seen God discipline the faithless multiple times in the wilderness. He had been one of the two spies, 40 years earlier, who had believed that with God they could enter the Promised Land. Each time, as Joshua had trusted and obeyed God he had experienced God at a greater level. Joshua now knew God intimately because of this process over and over again. Trust. Obey. Experience God.

Joshua had learned to trust in God through life experience, but also through God's promises. In Joshua 1, as he became the leader of Israel, Yahweh God had spoken these words directly to Joshua:

"The LORD said to Joshua . . . ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses . . . ⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

In these verses we see that God made a grand promise to Joshua, but it was built on three things: The faithfulness as God as a Promise keeper. Second, that Joshua would not turn from God's Word,

meditating on it day and night. Thirdly, that the presence of God, God Himself, would be with Joshua as he went to conquer the land that God had promised. It was not because Joshua was smart enough or strong enough. The land would be taken and the victory would be won because of God.

It was at this point that Joshua trusted that the same LORD who had stirred his heart to believe would do the same in the hearts of Israel.

As the LORD had already promised to Joshua, ***“I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you”*** (Joshua 3:7).

The people of Israel believed Joshua’s words, God’s words, and they marched around the city of Jericho. As promised, on the 7th day, when they marched and shouted, the walls fell, and God brought the victory.

What would you have done if you were Joshua? What would you have done if you were one of those of Israel and were told that God had promised victory if you would do nothing more than march, shout and believe? Would you have done it, or just stayed in the camp and waited until they returned? Would you have argued and raised up a group to vote against Joshua?

Joshua was not the only one who faced a crisis of belief, where the logic of God clashed with the logic of man. Abraham’s wife was still childless, even in her old age, yet God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation whose descendants would be numbered like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashores. You have Gideon, who was the youngest son from a weak family, from one of the smallest tribes of Israel, visited by an angel who calls him a mighty warrior and tells him to rescue Israel from the Midianites. We see the angel Gabriel announcing to the virgin, Mary, that she would give birth to Jesus. You have Peter being commanded by an angel to put on his shoes and robe and escape when he is in a prison surrounded by Roman guards. The angel tells the women at the tomb that Jesus is alive.

Mankind thinks from their limited, blinded, perspective. God speaks, knowing all things. As we read in Isaiah 55:8-9, ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”***

God’s ways are so different than our ways. How do we respond when God instructs us to do something that does not make sense to us, or does not make sense to those around us? Will we be the people who stand on faith and believe anyway? Will we meditate on God’s Word and pray for wisdom as the book of James instructs us to? Like Joshua, will we trust, obey and experience God like never before, or will we shrink back and follow God only to the point that it makes sense to us?

How will we respond to God’s Word when we read: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things on the earth. Forgive 70 times 7. Turn the other cheek. Go

the extra mile. Overcome evil with good. Reconcile one to another. Pray continually. It is better to give than receive. Flee temptation. Do not covet. Be content in all things. Help those in need. Bear each other's burdens. Regard one another as more important than yourself. Confess your sins to one another. Seek first the kingdom of God.

To the world, and even to our worldly thinking, God's Word at times seems wrong, but will we humble ourselves, stop and reconsider? Will we give God space to work? Is God doing something in that moment that is extremely logical, right and blessed from an eternal perspective, and we just can't see it yet? He made us. He knows how we work best. This is His world. In those moments will we take a deep breath, a step of faith, and trust and obey?

Proverbs 3:5-6 is clear: ***"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."*** This is not a call to set aside our intelligence. It is a call to believe that there is something beyond what we can comprehend.

A.W. Tozer once described a Christian's walking in the wisdom of God like this: ***"A real Christian is odd . . . He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest ... He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep, sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which is beyond knowledge."***

That is the reality of God. A world which God sees clearly and is gradually revealing to His children as they walk faithfully with Him.

The greatest example of the conflict between the wisdom of God and the foolishness of man is found in the gospel:

¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

The world seeks to give education and intelligence credit for changing mankind, but time and again history shows that an educated mind does not result in a regenerated heart. In today's world we have more education and learning than ever before, but yet immorality is still on the rise, and contentment, holiness and peace are still as out of reach as they ever were.

Paul is clearly stating that the wisdom of God is so far above anything this world can achieve. What seems wisdom to this world will be shown as foolishness. Worldly accolades and pleasures will be shown to be empty and vain. Regardless of how intelligent or wise one may seem, without Christ as his point of

reference one does not have access to true wisdom. How many people who were supposedly wise from the world's perspective will arrive at the end of their lives and have wasted it all?

Paul's simple explanation of the gospel had born most of its fruit amongst the simple people of Corinth. While we find in the New Testament references to some believers of status (Acts 17:34; 13:6-12; 17:4, 12; Romans 16:23), by and large those who thought themselves wise and influential had refused the gospel.

It was those who were most aware of their need that were most likely to listen to the claims of Christ. The wealthy and the well-educated trusted in themselves, but it was the slave and the servant, the manual laborers and illiterate who most easily trusted in the teachings of Christ.

In contrast, many believers who seem to be fools from the world's perspective will be vindicated as wise when their life comes to an end.

In God's wisdom salvation was not set aside only for the intelligent. If so, then they would glory in their brilliance and take credit for salvation. Also, then only the smartest of people would be reconciled to God. Instead, salvation is available to all mankind, regardless of intelligence, wealth, or ability. It is a gift of God so that men from every nation, tribe and tongue can have an opportunity to come to Christ.

To the outsider the Christians seemed like an ignorant group of uncultured people, but to the insider they knew they had found the timeless wisdom of God. Paul again called them to the precious fact that God had called them to Himself and revealed to them the truth of the cross.

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."¹ "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."² Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, did not sin. He willingly laid down His life on a Roman cross to pay for the sin of the world. After three days, He was raised from the dead, proving that sin has been completely paid for. All who will turn from their sin and believe in Jesus Christ will be forgiven of their sin and reconciled to God. The Holy Spirit will come to live in them and they will live forever in heaven. This is foolishness to the world, but the power of salvation for all who believe.

Let us repent and believe, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us admit and confess our sin, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us love one another as He has loved us, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us forgive others as we have been forgiven, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us have compassion and be generous to each other, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us share the gospel with urgency, even though the world will call it foolishness. Let us live with our eyes on eternity, even though the world will call it foolishness. May we live for the glory of God, even though the world will call it foolishness.

¹ (Romans 3:23) ² (Romans 6:23)

Discussion questions:

1. What did you find most meaningful about this sermon?
2. What lessons can we learn from the story of Jericho?
3. Have there been teachings in the Bible that you had a hard time obeying?
4. What in life makes it hard for people to obey Proverbs 3:5-6?
5. In your opinion, why does the world think following Jesus Christ is foolishness?
6. What do you think you need to remember from this sermon?
7. What do you need to do about that? How can we pray for you?