

## I. Introduction

- A. You might know that I was a church brat. I grew up in church. It was the kind of church where we sang old hymns. So I go back, church wise, pretty much as far as I remember.
- B. Of course, back then, there were no projectors, and no PowerPoint, and really no copy machines to speak of. My son asked, Dad, when you were little, were there cars? I said yes. He asked if there were cars before 1990, and I said yes.
- C. But there was no PowerPoint, so all our songs were in a big fat book called the hymnal. It was arranged topically. So all the Christmas songs were together, and all the Easter songs were together. And songs about evangelism or about world missions were pretty much together.
- D. Stay with me; I'm making a point. There was a section of hymns that were all about the WARFARE NATURE of the Christian life. So we had songs like:
  - 1. Onward, Christian Soldiers
  - 2. Sound the Battle Cry
  - 3. The Fight is On
  - 4. Soldiers of Christ Arise
  - 5. The Banner of the Cross
- E. Now, this is not really an AGE thing; it's a culture thing I'm talking about because some Christ followers get a little ticked off at the whole militaristic theme of the church. There's a huge push in the church for a kinder, gentler version of the faith that wants to sing love songs to Jesus and almost takes offense at a call to war.
- F. At Neighborhood Church, we state our mission this way: The mission of Neighborhood Church is to mobilize an army to fulfill the Great Commission. I think it's pretty obvious where we stand on the issue.
- G. And I want to show you a little bit why today, from this excellent book of Joshua. I'm going to read 11 verses, and then I'll back up and we'll talk about it.

## II. Joshua 6:17-27

- A. *17 "Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.*
- B. *18 And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.*
- C. *20 So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. 21 And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.*
- D. *22 But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, 'Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her.' 23 And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel.*
- E. *24 But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. 25 And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. 26 Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, 'Cursed be the man before the LORD who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates.'"*
- F. *27 So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country. (Joshua 6:17-27, NKJV).*

## III. The Fight

- A. In Joshua chapter six, God's people are entering the Promised Land. This is their inheritance. This is their best life. This is their place of blessing.
- B. But there's one huge problem: there are already people living in this land, and they don't want to leave—numerous tribes in strong, fortified cities. So, the Jews will have to fight for the land one city at a time.
- C. The truth here is that God gives us our inheritance just as He gave it to the children of Israel. You gain your promised land through struggle and conflict and warfare—every inch of it. No one else can win it for you. No one else can live your spiritual life for you. No one can fight your battles for you.
- D. And the first battle for the Jews was the walled fortress called Jericho.
- E. Through faith, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. We've been talking about that faith: Who remembers the four steps of the Faith-Rest Life?
  - 1. Know God's Promises
  - 2. Believe God's Promises
  - 3. Follow the Directions
  - 4. Enjoy God's Blessings
- F. This is your life: The faith-rest life, over and over and over.
- G. Now, I'm going to say something that might sound really weird to you, but it's super-important:
  - 1. The primary battle of your life as a follower of Jesus is NOT the battle to be a better person, or the battle against temptation, or the battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those are all important, and all good battles.
  - 2. But they are not the primary battle. And I would add that as long as you're making these things the primary battle, you're going to be a very confused, semi-defeated, and ultimately WORN OUT Christian.

3. If you are a follower of Jesus, and if your life is going to be characterized by WARFARE, you have to make sure you understand the warfare, understand the primary battle.
4. And here it is: are you ready for it?
5. The A-number-one, main battle of your life is the battle of faith: it is the fight to believe that what God has said is true enough to act like it.

## H. Listen:

1. *4 ...And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.* (1 John 5:4, NKJV).
- I. Faith is the victory. Whether or not the walls of Jericho tumble down is secondary. What matters most is that you had the faith to believe that what God had said was true enough to act like it.
- J. The toughest thing you will ever do is exercise faith. Live by faith. Walk by faith, not by sight. Keep on blessing God, even when your world falls apart—by faith, keep trusting Him. Be like Job, who said, though He slay me, yet will I trust him (Job 13:15). That is victory. That is what piles up rewards for you in heaven.
- K. Faith IS the victory in heaven regardless of outcomes on earth. Your job is faith, God's job is outcomes.
- L. And the biggest fight of your life is the fight to battle down:
  1. Your doubts about God, and
  2. Your need to be in control, and
  3. Your drive to fix everything, and
  4. Your bitterness when life doesn't go your way, and
  5. Everything else inside you that hates faith.
- M. That's your main fight, functionally speaking; your main battle, the fight of faith. If you can wrestle your fears enough to live the faith-rest life, you are going to take your Promised Land, you are going to possess your possessions, and you are going to experience the inheritance that God planned for you from the day He saved you.
- N. And when God told the Jews to march around Jericho without firing a shot, they did it. So 1,400 years later, the Bible could say:
  1. *30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.* (Hebrews 11:30, 31, NKJV).
- O. So, what have I said so far?
  1. I've said that your spiritual life is a fight.
  2. And that the central fight is a fight of faith.
- P. But I want to go deeper, and lay out two more bedrock truths that make the Faith-Rest Life actually Work, and then we're done.
- Q. This chapter pits God's people against the inhabitants of Jericho. But this battle does not stand alone. It is part of the conflict of the ages. The Bible teaches that there is an ongoing battle between good and evil, God and Satan, angels and demons, the kingdom of light and the domain of darkness.

## IV. Sermon

- A. The fight of faith is part of an ongoing struggle between good and evil.
  1. At the end of the Bible, St John receives a vision of the last days. He sees an evil ruler called the beast or the Antichrist. He sees how the Antichrist worships the devil, called the dragon.
    - a) *6 And he spoke terrible words of blasphemy against God, slandering His name and all who live in heaven, who are His temple. 7 And the beast was allowed to wage war against God's holy people and to overcome them. And he was given authority to rule over every tribe and people and language and nation* (Revelation 13:6, 7, NLT).
  2. All of us face different struggles. Some struggle with addiction, with drugs and alcohol. Some struggle with family problems—others with depression. Some face physical problems, or the heartache of watching your children go astray. School problems, moral struggles. Everybody has financial problems these days. How are you going to pay for school? How will you find a job? All kinds of struggles.
  3. You will never really understand these struggles until you place them in their fullest context.
  4. Every struggle you face is an outcropping of the cosmic conflict between Satan and God. (Eph 6:10-17).
  5. Your battles aren't random. They're not accidental. They are interconnected parts of a bigger conflict.
  6. The world is at war, and you are a soldier of the Christ. Whether taking Jericho captive, or capturing your own heart for Christ, every struggle in life is an outcropping of the cosmic conflict of the ages.
  7. There's a big reason why this is important.
  8. It means that you're not off in a corner fighting your own little battle that nobody in heaven cares about. When you struggle, God has a vested interest in your victory. It's HIS BATTLE. It matters to Him because HIS GLORY IS AT STAKE. When you face your Jericho, God's reputation is on the line. And you can bet your life that God will give you everything you need to win the fight of faith.
    - a) The Captain of the Lord's hosts never fails to provide for His troops.
  9. Because all your conflicts are part of a bigger conflict that God has been waging since the dawn of creation.
    - a) Your spiritual life is a fight.
    - b) The fight is a fight of faith.
    - c) The Fight of faith is part of a bigger struggle between good and evil.
- B. The fight of faith is messy.

1. It's crazy, and reactive, and you're winging it most of the time. That's how fights go. The life of faith (the faith-rest life) does not exempt you from feeling mixed up about your life.
2. This chapter explodes the myth that when you follow Jesus, your life will be neat and tidy and you'll live in Mayberry.
3. One of my best friends met with me to talk about his life, and he started crying. He had a piece of paper with his life all drawn out on it—he was maybe late 20's—and he had this paper with his life all mapped out, and when he would buy a house, and get married, and have kids.
4. It was all mapped out, but it wasn't working out according to plan. So he was crying.
5. Some of you think that being a good Christian means that your life is orderly, and that you can plan out your way from A to B to C and keep on schedule.
6. Let me know how that works for you.
7. Let me set you free:
  - a) You can do everything right with God, and not have your lawn perfect, and your house clean, and every hair in place, and every abdominal muscle showing, and your kids all lined up with their faces scrubbed.
  - b) It's okay to not be perfect.
  - c) It's okay to not perform all the time.
8. Faith is messy, and all our attempts at perfectionism are attempts to be what only God can be.
9. I think it's really cool the way Joshua wrote this chapter. The action is really choppy. If you were making a movie from this chapter, you wouldn't know where to point your camera. Some scholars think that the chapter was messed up in the copying. It needs editing, they say.
  - a) What we have now is a very rough and messy text. It has never been properly edited and cleared up. For example, one commentary says (Kroeze, in Woudstra, p. 12, n. 24) that this chapter has many "rough spots" including needless repetitions, insertions, interruptions of the flow of the story, etc."
10. They're right in that that the story doesn't flow, but they're wrong about why it doesn't flow.
  - a) What if the text is choppy on purpose? What if he is trying to make a point?
  - b) I'm a writer—I would send chapter six back to the author and say, edit this!!!
  - c) BUT....
  - d) What if clutter of Joshua six is not a literary failure? What if it is a literary device?
  - e) What if Joshua wants to show that you don't get to edit life before you live it?
  - f) And that the genius of God, the omniscience of God coupled with the love of God and the omnipotence of God can take our messed up, seat-of-the-pants FAITH, and create something everlastingly beautiful out of it.
    - (1) Something with maximum grace for you
    - (2) And maximum glory for God
  - g) We're all just winging it, all except God.
11. I love my wife. Margi is sexy, smart, fun, funny, devoted—I am a blessed man.
12. She is also very clean, and I have permission to share this with you because I'm not stupid.
13. Very clean, as in the TV show Monk.
14. When we got married, she had a BIG adjustment to make. And then we had dogs. And then we had kids.
15. We printed out a Bible verse and framed it on the wall in our house:
  - a) *Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox.* (Proverbs 14:4, NKJV).
16. You can't have a clean barn unless you make it an oxen-free barn, but that's not what barns are built for.
17. And you can't have a clean, orderly, tidy life unless you have a FAITH-FREE LIFE.
18. So here's the good news.
  - a) You can feel messy.
  - b) You can feel clueless.
  - c) You can feel surprised.
  - d) You can feel lost.
  - e) You can feel out of control.
  - f) You can feel like you're going in circles.
19. And still be living by faith. It's okay. If you are following God's directions, the walls of Jericho WILL fall down; it's just a matter of time.
20. The faith-rest life is messy.

#### V. Conclusion

- A. In verse five, God issues a promise: "the wall of the city shall fall down flat." In verse 20 God kept the promise. In between there was a whole lot of very-confusing, waiting and chaos.
- B. Nowhere does God explain to Joshua what's going on. And nowhere does Joshua explain to the people what's going on. Why march around the city? Why carry the ark? Why keep silence? Why seven days? Why seven times the seventh day? Why blow the trumpets? Joshua six presents more questions than answers. And that is exactly the way a life of faith feels.
- C. This brings us very close to the core of faith. Many times in the Bible, God's people ask why.

1. Gideon asked, why has Israel fallen on hard times?
  2. Job asked God, Why do you persecute me?
  3. King David asked, God, why do you stand so far off?
  4. The prophet Habbakuk asked, God, why do the wicked prosper?
  5. Even Jesus Christ asked, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.
- D. Do you realize that not once in the whole Bible does God answer the question "why"? God's reasons are simply not for us to know. Why did this happen? Why did I suffer this loss? Why won't you heal me, Lord? God never answers the why question. Instead, God answers a different question altogether.
- E. God answers "who."
1. When Job asked why about his suffering, God answered, "Where were you when I created the foundations of the earth?" Then God gave Job a vision of His great power and glory. God answered the "who" question, not the "why" question.
  2. When Habbakuk asked why about good things happening to bad people, he received a vision of God, splitting the heavens, thundering down from the mountains, and destroying evil. God answered the "who" question, not the "why" question.
  3. And when Jesus asked, why have You forsaken Me, He ultimately received not only the resurrection, but also exaltation to majesty in heaven.
- F. You see, the faith-rest life never requires us to know why; we never really understand all that's going on. But we do know Who it is that rules what's going on.
- G. Very good Christians can be very confused and in the dark as to why life turns out the way it does; but in the faith-rest life, we are never confused about Who is in control. God is in control. God is on His throne. God will make a way. God will provide a Lamb. We are His people; and He is accomplishing wondrous purposes through us, far greater than we'll ever understand.
- H. And even though you're frustrated because God is slow, or you're afraid because a storm is washing over you, and it's scary.
- I. Hasn't God already proven Himself to you?
- J. How can the One who gave His life for us—who left His glory and came down into this world that hated Him and died a terrible death to deliver us from eternal condemnation from the holiness of God—how can a Savior Like Jesus ever fail to care for us?
- K. You can trust Him.
- L. The most faithful follower of Jesus has days of questioning. Our lives have loose ends, and unfinished business, and ups and downs. And that's fine, because ultimately, it is not in our ability to win the battles. Only God can make the walls of opposition fall down, and He does it through our weakness, that the excellency and glory might all belong to Him.
- M. We supply faith.
- N. God supplies victories.
- O. Our lives are in the hands of an infinitely wise God. He hasn't let us go.
- P. What seems like going in circles, what seem like needless delays, and what seem like unanswerable riddles—these are all part of God's perfect plan.
- Q. His perfect campaign for victory.
- R. His guaranteed victory over the devil and his dark domain.
- S. *God says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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 (Isa 55:8-9).*
- T. Your faith in that God is the victory.
- Encamped along the hills of light,  
Ye Christian soldiers, rise,  
And press the battle ere the night  
Shall veil the glowing skies.  
Against the foe in vales below  
Let all our strength be hurled.  
Faith is the victory, we know,  
That overcomes the world.
- Refrain
- Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory!  
Glorious victory, that overcomes the world.  
(John H. Yeats, 1891)