

What's the Message from Jericho?

- I. Understand your position.
- II. Trust what God says and promises.
- III. Confidently obey God's directions.

Dear Christian friends,

We've now come halfway through the church year. We've just finished what's **called** the FESTIVAL half of the calendar. It's called that because it **has all** those festivals – Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost. That first half of the church year is also called the “LIFE OF CHRIST” – because we go through the life of Christ and all Jesus did to save us.

This **second half** of the church year has a different emphasis. It's called the NON-FESTIVAL half **because** there just aren't any big festivals in it. The focus also shifts from the **life of Christ** to the LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN or better yet – OUR NEW LIFE in Christ. We've seen how Jesus has saved us – we now see how that truth changes our **hearts** and gives our lives a **whole new meaning**.

Our new life in Christ is a LIFE OF FAITH. But just what is faith? What does it mean when we say, “I **believe....**”? **Today's readings** are good illustrations of that life of faith. Joshua here leading the Israelites **in their attack** on the city of Jericho – fighting that battle GOD'S WAY – that certainly called for **faith**.

As Joshua contemplated that battle he met this stranger who **turned out** to be God Himself. Joshua humbly asks God, **“What message does my Lord have for His servant?”** Looking at these verses we ask God, “WHAT'S THE MESSAGE FROM JERICO?” **God's message** is 1)understand your position, 2)trust what God says and promises and 3)confidently obey God's directions.

I. Understand your position.

With these verses Moses was dead and Joshua – Moses' faithful aide – was the **new leader** of God's people. Under Joshua's direction the Israelites had already crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land of Canaan. Now it was time for them to CONQUER the **Canaanites** and take possession of the land. Their first big battle was LOOMING – the walled city of Jericho.

One day Joshua **seems** to have gone OFF BY himself. Was he perhaps scouting things out for himself – thinking about what was the BEST WAY to **attack** Jericho? **Apparently LOST IN THOUGHT** Joshua suddenly **“looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.”** Joshua boldly **“went up to him and asked, ‘Are you for us or for our enemies?’”**

Joshua wanted to know WHOSE SIDE this **“stranger”** was on. **“‘Neither,’ he replied, ‘but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’”** This stranger is none other than the LORD God Himself and so He's called in the following verses. God also impresses that fact on Joshua as He tells Joshua JUST AS He had told Moses at the burning bush, **“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.”**

Joshua had asked, **“Are you for us or for our enemies?”** God said, **“Neither.”** WAIT a minute! I want to know if God is ON MY SIDE – I'm sure Joshua did too. But right here is the FIRST MESSAGE from Jericho. The real question is **not** is God on MY SIDE but am I on GOD'S side. That

might sound like being **nit-picky** but in our life and WALK OF FAITH we must understand our **position**.

Our position is not OVER God as His bosses or BESIDE God as His equals or **buddies**. Our position is BELOW God. **He** is our superior – **we** are His servants. The centurion in the gospel reading illustrated that so well. **As a soldier** he understood the army CHAIN OF COMMAND – the sergeant outranks the private – the general outranks them all. In our WORLDLY RELATIONSHIPS we **may be** in positions of authority over others – parents over children, etc. But finally GOD OUTRANKS all – **no matter how far up** the ladder we may climb. God Himself had chosen Joshua to be Israel's leader – but Joshua still remained under God. Joshua UNDERSTOOD that and acted accordingly. ***“Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence and asked, ‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’”***

The first message of Jericho is to UNDERSTAND our position before God. **Sometimes** people get a CHIP on their shoulder **as if** God OWES them – owes them a good life – a good job – good health, etc. If God doesn't do EXACTLY as **they** want they get all ticked off at God. Wait a minute! It's time for a REALITY CHECK!

Like Joshua and these OT Israelites we've been so richly blessed by God. God has been SO GOOD to us – so faithful – so forgiving – so patient. **By God's grace** in Jesus we are children of God – heirs of eternal life in heaven. Yet we must always UNDERSTAND our **position**. Yes, I want God ON MY SIDE but that comes only when I'M ON **God's** side – following God's **lead** and **Word**. Our LIFE OF FAITH is not us telling God, “This is how we're going to do things” but God telling you and me, “This is how it will be.”

We see that here with Joshua. God was about to tell Joshua HOW they were **going to conquer** Jericho. The second message of Jericho is:

II. Trust what God says and promises.

“The LORD said to Joshua, ‘See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands.’” ***“I HAVE delivered.”*** IN GOD'S EYES the battle is already over – **Jericho** has already fallen. God also emphasizes that his is ALL HIS doing – ***“I have delivered Jericho into your hands.”*** God's plan of attack makes the SAME POINT.

God's plan calls for Joshua and the Israelites to TRUST God – to **trust** that God's ways work. The battle plan is QUITE SIMPLE – and from a military point of view it's quite STUPID. Could you imagine Gen. Eisenhower using this to **invade France** on D-Day? “We'll march up Omaha beach once and then get back in our ships. We'll do that for six days. On the **seventh day** we'll march the beach seven times – blow the bugles and walk right over those German pillboxes.” That's NUTS! Common sense told Joshua that this would never work – there had to be a BETTER way.

God's plans called for Joshua and the Israelites to TRUST Him. God's plans also made clear to them, “YOU won't be winning this battle – **I will win** it for you. YOU won't conquer the city – **I will give** it to you. TRUST Me.”

Do you see some parallels to our **lives** and **battles**? What's the ANSWER to sin and guilt – to **having** a good relationship with God – to being sure you're **going to heaven** when you die? COMMON SENSE is you made the **mess** – you clean it up. It's UP TO US to make things right with God. GOD SAYS, “That won't work. THIS is how we're **going to do** things – **I'll do** it ALL BY Myself.”

God's plan is SO SIMPLE and it's the only one that **really works**. God Himself becomes a man – the **almighty Son** of God is born a helpless little baby in Bethlehem. That ONE Person – the **God-**

man – takes the place of ALL people who will ever live on this planet. **In our place** Jesus lives the holy and perfect life **each one** of us owed God. Then Jesus takes the sin of **all** those BILLIONS of people – yours and mine included! – ALL ON Himself. **In our place** – bearing our sin – Jesus is punished – Jesus suffers – Jesus dies. **On the cross** Jesus looks SO PATHETIC – such a LOSER. But **on the cross** Jesus did what nobody else could do. Jesus’ shed blood **“cleanses us from all sin.”** Jesus death is **“the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the whole world.”** Jesus’ death on the cross paid for all sins of all people – defeated the devil and conquered death. FOR PROOF just look to Easter morning – Jesus risen triumphant! To the UNBELIEVER all this is **“foolishness”** and **nonsense**.

Now see how God takes people **“dead in sin”** and makes them **“alive in Christ”** – how God turns people who **hate** Him into children who love Him. **God tells** us to put some water on them and say, **“I baptize you...”** God says to confront them with their sin and guilt and then tell them all about Jesus. That’s not VERY IMPRESSIVE – yet **you and I** are living proof that the gospel is **“the power of God unto salvation.”** That’s still the ONLY WAY God makes and keeps people Christians. And it doesn’t stop there. Jesus invites us to SUCH A FEAST! To the eye it’s **simple bread** and wine – yet Jesus says, **“This is My body, given for you – My blood shed for you. Take, eat; take, drink!”** SUCH BLESSINGS in such a strange yet simple way!

Learn here at the **Book** – the **font** – the **table** – the MESSAGE of Jericho – TRUST God’s Word and promises. Human reason says, “There **must be** a BETTER way.” God says, “This is MY way and I promise it **works**.” LEARN that **message of Jericho** AND then...

III. Confidently obey God’s directions.

Imagine if Joshua and the Israelites had refused to follow God’s orders. **No**, they were going to lay siege to the city – starve the people – attack with their bows and arrows. They **would have** LOST. Not following God’s ways would have COST them an easy victory. Their unbelief would have CHEATED them out of God’s **stunning** victory.

THANKFULLY that’s not what happened. **For six days** they may have looked and felt like FOOLS **marching around** the city. You can easily picture the people of Jericho laughing at them and **making fun** of them. But come the seventh day – **“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.”**

Living the LIFE OF FAITH is not easy. We can so want to walk by sight and not by faith. Day after day there are those never-ending battles with temptations and pet sins. It’s SO HARD to keep telling your sinful nature, “NO! I’m a Christian now.” It’s **so hard** to keep telling the devil and world, “LEAVE me alone. I’m a child of God now.” It’s a REAL STRUGGLE to stay faithful to our Lord and His Word – to live a God-centered, God-pleasing life. SO OFTEN – DAILY! – we get tired – we give in – we fall – we sin.

HOW can we live that life of faith? GOD says, “Read your Bible – **every day**. Come to church **every week**. Come often to My Supper. Daily remember and **live** your Baptism.” Oh, there must be a DIFFERENT – a BETTER way! GOD says, “Just do it. I promise you – it **works**.” And it DOES. Just TRY it. Follow God’s directions and faithfully use His means of grace. That’s HOW GOD KEEPS our eyes on Jesus – keeps assuring us of His love and forgiveness and eternal life. That’s how God strengthens us and keeps us going in our life of faith. God’s ways DO WORK. **God’s ways** are the ONLY way. That’s the message of Jericho. Amen.

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