

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

GOD'S PROMISE FOR YOU
PREPARING FOR THE PROMISE
SEPTEMBER 11-17, 2016



MAIN POINT

God's plans are greater than our own, so we must learn to surf the wave of what God is up to.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect with each other, but also connect the sermon to the study.

1. Ask members of the group to introduce themselves. Additionally, ask them to share 1 or 2 highlights from their summer. What was the most exciting thing that happened? What was the most disappointing thing that happened?
2. Overall, would you say that your summer went as planned? Better? Worse?
3. When have God's plans for your life or someone you know proven to be so much greater than what you first thought was possible?

Leader: The longer we live, the more we can come to learn that we're not in charge of our lives. Things just don't go as planned as frequently as we'd like. The good news is that there is a sovereign God whose plans are greater than our own. They are superior not only in what they achieve, but in how they achieve it, even if we don't understand them or if they come at us in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. We're much better off learning to surf the wave of what God is up to rather than trusting our own plans. The story of Joshua and the city of Jericho illustrates this well.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

>HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 6:1-5.

4. What would have been especially difficult for Joshua and the Israelites to follow these instructions given what they were facing? Why or why not?

Leader: Jericho was well fortified with outer walls that were six feet thick and inner walls that were fifty feet high. It was an imposing structure. The city's inhabitants saw the Israelites coming and hunkered down for a fight. This situation made the task of taking the city that much harder for the Israelites, yet not for their God. The statement in 6:1 shows a great potential obstacle that is effortlessly overcome by the all-powerful God. God's instructions to Joshua about the taking of Jericho contain no reference to military strategy but rather indicate that it is essentially to be a ritual ceremony. God was giving the city to Joshua and the Israelites; He did not require their plans and strategy. The use of the past tense "delivered" (v. 2) shows that while the event had not yet happened, the outcome was decided by the Lord.

>HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 6:6-11

5. Why was the ark of the Lord marched around the city? What was the significance of the ark?

Leader: Beyond the instruction God gave him, Joshua gave further instruction regarding the armed guard that was to walk out in front of the ark. Joshua also expanded upon the way in which the ark was referred to: “the ark of the covenant” (v. 6) and “the ark of the Lord” (vv. 6–7), focusing the people’s attention on it and its significance. The battle plan was God’s and the success would be God’s. Joshua had faith and was obedient. The ark was God’s footstool. It was a visible representation of the invisible presence of God. The ark led them through the wilderness and it would once again lead the march. God marched before His people.

6. Why do you think Joshua told everyone to be silent until the final shout? How did silence call on the people to have faith? If they could not speak to one another, who could they talk to? What is your default action when you have moments of silence in life?

Leader: When difficult issues and seasons of life arise, we would do well to first approach God in prayer. Then we can approach others who can give wise counsel. If we run to others with problems first, then our actions could reveal our faith is first in people, not in God. Additionally, coming to God in prayer is a means of “surfing the wave of what He is up to” even when we don’t understand it. In fact, prayer can help cement us to trust God and His plans when it is counterintuitive to do so. With God’s truth available to us through His Word and His presence with us in prayer, it’s dumbfounding that we would give our minds to anything else.

>HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 6:12-21

7. How do you think the soldiers felt as they marched silently? What temptations would they have faced in carrying out God’s plan for battle? Why would obedience be difficult?

8. What is the hardest thing for you when it comes to trusting God’s plans over your own?

Leader: That faith is required presumes that life will give us ample opportunity to need it. In other words, faith, by definition, is never easy to have and to act on. The means by which Joshua’s soldiers would take Jericho was a great challenge of faith, but so also was their command to devote everything to the LORD by destroying them (vv. 17-19). (For more on vv. 17-19, see the commentary on page 4-5.)

>HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 6:22-27

9. In what ways did God keep His promises? Why is it important to understand that God keeps His promises?

Leader: God kept His promises by delivering the city (except for Rahab and her family, who He had pledged to protect because they cared for the spies—Josh. 2:14, 17-20). We must always remember we are praying to God

who keeps His promises. They may not be kept immediately, and not in the manner we would hope for, but in the end He is who He says He is and does what He promises.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. What is your Jericho? What walls stand seemingly insurmountable before you? What would be necessary for you to believe that God could have plans for you that are different than your plans to breach the wall?

11. There is often a direct relationship between our trust in God's plans and the practice of spiritual disciplines. How is your Bible reading and prayer (among other disciplines) possibly impacting your trust? What are we tempted to fill our minds with in place of God's promises?

12. What is the best example from your own life where God made it very clear that His plans were greater than your own? How can you use that story to shore up your faith with the present walls you face or to help others struggling in a similar way?

PRAYER

Pray Isaiah 55:8-13 together as a group.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **How has your pursuit of proper spiritual preparation impacted you this week?**
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Isaiah 55:8 — "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

JOSHUA 6:1-27

6:1. This verse sets the stage for the episode at Jericho and is grammatically not part of the narrative story line. The problem was Jericho was “tightly shut up.”

6:2-5. God’s instructions to Joshua about the taking of Jericho contain no reference to military strategy but rather indicate that it is essentially to be a ritual ceremony. God’s words consist of an encouraging assurance to Joshua, instructions for Israel’s part in the episode, and a statement about the amazing results. The ritual nature of the episode is suggested by the absence of any military strategy, by the blowing of the trumpets, by the prominence of the priests and the ark of the covenant, and by the solemn processions.

The outcome of the entire affair is announced to Joshua at the outset: God had already given Jericho, its king, and its warriors into Joshua’s hands. Thus, the extensive marching, blowing of trumpets, and shouting that the Israelites were to engage in is shown to be essentially ceremonial because God was giving the victory. This is reinforced by the comment at the end of v. 5, where God stated clearly that the wall would collapse through no effort on the people’s part beyond the ceremonial actions just mentioned. Seven priests blowing seven trumpets were to march in front of the ark around Jericho for seven days, once each day and seven times on the seventh day.

6:6-7. As he did several times earlier in connection with the crossing of the Jordan, Joshua passed along to the people what we are told God had commanded him. Beyond this is the instruction in v. 7 about the “armed guard” that was to walk in front of the ark, along with the priests. Joshua also expanded upon the way in which the ark was referred, focusing the people’s attention on it and its significance.

6:8-11. Little new substantive information is found here except that, in addition to the armed guard and the trumpet-blowing priests preceding the ark, there was also a “rear guard” following the ark. All this time the horns were sounding. The noise appears to have been solely from the horns, since v. 10 states that Joshua had previously instructed the people that they were not to make any sounds until the day on which he would instruct them to shout. The silence is enjoined in three ways: (1) they were not to raise a shout, (2) they were not to make their voices heard, and (3) they were not to utter a word. Verse 11 prosaically tells of the circling of the city one time on the first day and the return to spend the night at the encampment.

6:12-14. The activity on the second day was exactly the same as on the first, and it is reported as such (v. 13 echoes vv. 8-9 very closely, and v. 14 echoes v. 11). The narrator, now that the pattern is established, states that the same happened on the first six days, and the stage is set for the climactic seventh day. Verse 12 begins with the statement that “Joshua got up early in the morning,” which is exactly the same wording as we find in 3:1, another passage where an important march was to be taken.

6:15-16. The marching action on the seventh day is described much more quickly than for days one and two, since the story’s climax quickly approaches. In strict accord with God’s instructions (vv. 4-5), Joshua commanded the people to shout when the priests gave one long, sustained blast on their horns. Once again, the already-accomplished fact that the Lord had given Israel the land is reported (now, “the city”). The report of the execution of his command is delayed until v. 20, however, by his instructions regarding the Israelites’ treatment of Rahab and their handling of the things that had been devoted to destruction.

6:17-19 The bulk of Joshua’s instructions in vv. 17-19 had to do with how the Israelites were to deal with the city of Jericho, its inhabitants, and its booty once these fell into their hands. First, he made it clear that these all were to be completely destroyed. The NRSV’s rendering in v. 17a captures the nuances: “And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction.” Things “devoted to the LORD” were off limits to the Israelites because they were to be completely destroyed, as an offering of sorts to the Lord.

Rahab was specifically exempted from this destruction in the book’s first reference to her since chap. 2 (v. 17b). This exemption stands in tension with Yahweh’s instructions for dealing with the peoples in Canaan in Deut 7:1-5 and 20:16-18. Deuteronomy 20:16-18 states, “However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you.

Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.” However, as we have seen earlier, the crucial difference between Rahab and the other Canaanites was her demonstration of faith, both in deeds and words.

These verses contain the first significant discussion in the Book of Joshua of the related concepts of “devoted things,” “devoting a city to the LORD,” and the complete destruction of the Canaanites. We have already noted the instructions in v. 17 to devote the entire city of Jericho to destruction. The verb can be rendered “to devote to the LORD” or “to devote to destruction” or “to completely destroy,” and the noun can be rendered as “devoted things” or “destruction.” The NIV text note makes clear the connection between the idea of devotion and destruction: “The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them.”

Verse 18 gives further details. Certain items were to be set apart for destruction, and if they were not, Israel itself would be subject to the same fate; Israel itself would become “a devoted thing.” Verse 19 continues to develop this idea. The treasures of Jericho were to be set apart for the Lord, since they were sacred, that is, holy. As such, they were to go into his treasury. The term here for “treasury” is the same one used for those in Solomon’s temple, built many years later (1 Kgs 7:51). However, since no temple stood in Joshua’s day, the exact nature and location of this treasury is unknown. The “treasury of the LORD’S house” is mentioned in v. 24; it may have been associated with the “house of God” at Gilgal mentioned in 9:23. The sacred tent at Shiloh in Samuel’s day was also called “the house of the LORD” (1 Sam 1:7). There is no need to suppose that this referred, anachronistically, to the later temple. In Ps 27:4, 6, the words “house of the LORD” and “his tabernacle” are used interchangeably, and the references here in Joshua may have been to the tabernacle as the Lord’s house, not the temple.

6:20-21. The actual “battle” of Jericho is described very briefly in v. 20, and the story line suspended after v. 16 is now resumed, with the report of the execution of Joshua’s command that the people should shout. Verse 21 expands on the description at the end of v. 20: the Israelites’ taking of the city entailed their devoting everything in it to destruction. The totality of the destruction is reinforced by the two word pairs in v. 21—“men and women,” “young and old”—and by the listing of the animals, which can be translated as “and even including cattle, sheep, and donkeys.”

6:22-25. Joshua instructed two spies—the spies who had earlier made the oath with Rahab to spare her and her family on the basis of her faith, which had been demonstrated in her actions and her words. The instructions were that they should bring Rahab and her family out of the city alive, in accordance with their oath to her, and they did precisely that. The entire city was put to the torch, except for the articles that had been mentioned in v. 19—the valuables that were saved for the Lord’s sanctuary: the articles of silver, gold, bronze, and iron. Rahab and her family and extended household were spared because of what she did for the spies, and, the author tells us, she still lived there until the day that he wrote those words.

6:26. Joshua pronounced a curse against anyone who would rebuild the city of Jericho. Many years later, this curse found a fulfillment when Hiel, a man from Bethel, “rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun” (1 Kgs 16:34). The key words of the curse are found in both texts, showing the strict faithfulness of the Lord to His own words or those legitimately spoken on His behalf.

6:27. The statement here about the Lord’s being with Joshua and his fame spreading throughout the land echoes two earlier statements, where God promised Joshua His presence, just as He had been with Moses (3:7) and where God began to exalt Joshua in the eyes of the people (4:14).