

WHY JERICHO FELL Hebrews 11:30

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days" (Hebrews 11:30).

Few stories in the Bible are better known than the story of Joshua and the battle for Jericho.

I hear this Sunday school song always in the car

*Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls came tumbling down.*

And then comes this verse:

*You may talk about your men of Gideon
You may brag about your men of Saul
There's none like good old Joshua
At the battle of Jericho.*

The singular nature of this event stands out because it is a story of God's people emerging victorious when facing an impossible situation.

Although God had promised to give them the Promised Land, the mighty walled city stood in their way.

Unless they found a way to bring down those walls, the city could not be taken, and if the city was not taken, the Promised Land would never be theirs.

We only need to know one important fact: *It was totally impossible to bring down those walls.*

Jericho stood between them and all that God had promised.

A smart man would say, "No way," and walk away.

Yet God's people won a great victory that day.

How did it happen?

Hebrews 11:30 answers with two words - "By faith."

That's all it says. "By faith."

But the story seems so incredible that we need to investigate further.

What sort of faith was it that caused the walls to come down?

Let me suggest 5 answers to that question.

In the first place, the walls came down because of . . .

I. Faith In Spite of Long Odds

The Canaanites built Jericho as a kind of “gateway fortress” to their land. Any invading enemy would have to deal with the great walled city of Jericho. You could not simply bypass it. Jericho was too large and too strong to be ignored.

What was Jericho to Joshua and the people of God?

- A city of pagan unbelief.
- A city of strategic importance.
- A city of human impossibility.

All three are crucial.

Pagan unbelief must be confronted head on. The corrupt Canaanite religion with its emphasis on idolatry and immorality could never coexist with the true worship of God. It must be confronted and defeated.

Thus, the city had a spiritual importance and a military importance. And because the walls were so high that they seemed to reach to the sky (Deuteronomy 9:1), the city must be completely defeated or the Jews would never be safe.

What could the Jews do in the face of this seeming impossibility?

A forward attack simply would not succeed. They had no way to tear down the walls and enter the city.

If they could not skip Jericho, and if they could not breach the walls themselves, what could they do?

But the Jews faced an even greater obstacle. The walls fell because of . . .

II. Faith That Followed a Very Strange Plan

In Joshua 6, God instructed the Jews to do a number of unusual things, none of which had any military value.

- March around the town once a day for six days (**v. 3**).
- March with the Ark of the Covenant (**v. 4**).
- Put seven priests in front of the Ark (**v. 4**).
- On the seventh day march around Jericho seven times (**v. 5**).
- Have the priests blow rams’ horns as they marched (**v. 5**).
- On the seventh time around on the seventh day, have the people shout
- When the people shout, the walls will come down (**v. 5**).
- When the walls come down, enter the city and conquer it (**v. 5**).

Joshua added a few refining details to the plan:

- 1) He instructed the people to be perfectly silent as they marched around the city.
- 2) He put soldiers in front of the priests and behind the ark.
- 3) He had the priest blow the rams' horn (the shofar) continually.

For six days they marched around the city once and then returned to their camp.

On the seventh day, at the end of the seventh time around the city, the priests sounded a long blast and the people shouted as loud as they could.

Let's stop the story right here.

What are the chances that this particular strategy would cause the mighty walls of Jericho to come tumbling down?

Marching.
Blowing horns.
Shouting.

Sounds like something you'd see at a football game.

You won't find a military expert anywhere who would recommend the Joshua Plan as the best way to conquer a walled city.

This is no small point. Let's lay it out in a simple equation:

Marching + horns + shouting =???

What you've got so far is a whole lot of noise.

Suppose you go to the Great Wall of China that snakes its way through northern China for hundreds of miles. What would bring down a wall like that?

Well, you could come up with many things, but marching and horns and shouting would probably not be on the list.

But those high walls were no match for the Almighty.

So far what we've got would seem to fall into the category of "Greatest Military Blunders" that you might see on a History Channel special.

But at this point we encounter something new and vital. The walls fell because of . . .

III. Faith That God Would Somehow Give Them Victory

We get 2 hints of this in the story.

1) God said He was going to give them the city.

This is what God said to Joshua before he gave him the plan: "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men" (Joshua 6:2).

Note the past tense: "I have delivered." Not "I will deliver."

God speaks of Jericho as having already been defeated.

That's a key point. God is saying, "It's a done deal. Those walls are coming down. It's just a matter of time."

Now that shouldn't surprise anyone who believes in God. He can do things like that. He speaks and it is done.

In a real sense, the battle was over before it was started.

God promised to deliver the city, and in due course, he made good on his promise.

2) God put Himself in the middle of the battle plan.

God put Himself in the middle of the battle plan by having the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant as they marched around Jericho (v. 4).

Remember that the Ark contained:

- The Ten Commandments, the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded.
- The lid of the Ark was the golden Mercy Seat where the high priest would offer a sacrifice in the Holy of Holies, once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).
- The ark was not just another piece of religious furniture, like a table or a lampstand. The ark represented the very presence of God with his people.

- Putting the ark out front was like God saying, "I'm going to lead this parade."

All normal military options are now off the table.

It's God plus the people.

There is yet another aspect to consider.

What exactly were the people of Jericho thinking during that long week when the Jews marched around the city once a day, in total silence except for the sound of those blaring rams' horns?

The Bible tells us only that the people of Jericho shut the gates for fear of the people of Israel (Joshua 6:1). This happened *before* the marching ever began.

I think the collective effect would have created a sense of mounting dread inside the city.

They knew the Jews could never breach the walls on their own, but on the other hand, they were trapped inside and dared not go out.

Plus, they had heard how the Jews had crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land and they had heard how the Jews had defeated the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og (Joshua 2:8-10).

They also had that strange marching to contend with each day. One imagines that it was a kind of divine psychological warfare at work here.

Although the people of Jericho did not know it, they were defeated before the walls ever fell.

They lost the battle when God got involved.

Let's redo that that equation one more time:

Marching + horns + shouting + God = "The walls came tumbling down"

It's God who made all the difference at Jericho.

Those high walls were no match for the Almighty.

The God who created those stones could easily blow them over. We don't know exactly how he did it, only that he did it, and the city was then taken by Joshua and his people.

Illustration:

There was a day when Robert Morrison was a passenger on a ship to China. History records that he was the first Protestant missionary to China.

One day the captain of the ship asked a rather disparaging question. "What do you think you're going to do? Convert China?"

"No," came the quiet reply. "I don't think I'll ever convert China. I think God will."

That is the same faith that brought down the walls of Jericho.

We come to a fourth characteristic of this "Jericho faith." The walls fell because of . . .

IV. Faith That Expressed Itself in Persevering Obedience

If God is the real hero of this story-and He is-then we face another question.

Why did God have the people march around the city for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day?

It's not as if their marching somehow destabilized the stones in the wall.

It is, I think, a lesson about the power of God on one hand and the need for perseverance on our part.

God has so ordered the moral universe that He responds to our faith when it is actually put to work.

It's not passive faith that He honors, but active faith, living faith, faith that actually does something.

If you read the rest of Joshua 6, you discover that God's promises do not equal inactivity.

Read it all and you will discover . . .

Diligent preparation (vv. 6-7)

Careful discipline (v. 10)

Patient repetition (v. 14)

Audacious jubilation (v. 20)

Complete obedience (v. 21)

Intentional compassion (vv. 23-25)

Think about this for a moment.

God could have said, "Sit tight. Don't do anything. I'll knock over the walls and destroy the city myself."

Is there any problem with that? No, not really.

God is fully able to work with or without human means.

But His normal plan is to use people to accomplish His purposes.

Without God we can't, without us God won't!

So even though God caused the walls to fall down, the people still had to march, they still had to shout, and when the walls fell down, they still had to take the city, fighting door to door.

And this is the precise point the writer of Hebrews wants us to understand - "By faith" the walls fell down.

How do we know it was "by faith"?

Because the people of God put their faith into practice by marching around the city day after day after day.

And so we can sum up the lessons of this story in one final statement. The walls fell because of . . .

V. Faith That Acted in Spite of Any Doubts

The best definition of faith I've ever heard - ***Faith is belief plus unbelief and acting on the belief part.***

We all know that belief is involved in faith. You have to believe something before you can have faith.

If you go to a doctor, you must *believe* he can help you. If you don't *believe*, you'll never go in the first place.

Before you step into an elevator, you've got to *believe* it will hold you up. If you don't *believe*, you'll end up taking the stairs.

So belief is always the first part of faith.

It is the conviction that certain things are true.

Unfortunately, some people stop their definition of faith right there. They think faith is belief plus nothing else.

Faith to them is pure belief without any mixture of doubt. That's okay as long as you stay in your house, in your bed, and under the covers.

But in this world, it's hard to arrive at 100% certainty.

You *hope* the doctor can help you, but you could get worse and not better.

You *hope* the elevator will hold you up, but maybe the cable has gone bad.

People who truly believe that faith means 100% certainty are paralyzed. They are waiting for something that will never happen.

In truth, there is always unbelief mixed in with our belief.

You see it best in the big decisions of life.

You get a good job offer in another part of the country. It's a great opportunity, but you don't want to move. You are stuck in your present job, but the kids are happy in school. Your wife doesn't want to move, but you've found twice the house for

half the money. You think you should, but some of your friends aren't sure. Late at night you lie awake tossing and turning, first going one way and then going another.

That's reality. You don't have 100% certainty and you don't know of any way to get 100% certainty.

You think so, you hope so, you pray for guidance, you seek counsel, you write it all down, you wait for a lightning bolt from heaven but it never comes.

You think it didn't take faith to march around Jericho for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day?

God told them that the walls would fall down, but they still had to do the marching.

That's "acting on the belief part."

a) Stalling by Faith

What is faith?

In the big decisions of life, faith is *not* waiting for 100% certainty.

Faith is wavering between belief and unbelief, doubt and assurance, hope and despair, and finally, hesitantly, with your heart in your hands, *acting on the belief part.*

Let me put this very clearly.

Many people think “living by faith” means staying over in the “Belief” column until you get certainty. But that almost never happens. That’s not “living by faith;” That’s “stalling by faith.”

Living by faith means acting on the belief part.

It means taking a step of faith, however small, however halting, however unsure of yourself you may be.

And in that light we can understand this story even more clearly.

The Hebrews marched around the walls once a day for seven days.

Can you imagine the scene?

Thousands of Jews line up the first day to march around the city. In front are the priests with the Ark of the Covenant.

They march around blowing their rams’ horns.

Inside the pagans are scared to death.

Nothing happens.

The next day the Jews march around again. And nothing happens.

On the third day they march around again. And nothing happens.

Only this time the people inside are starting to relax. It’s some kind of crazy joke. These Jews must be nuts!

And outside, some of the people are complaining. “Hey, Joshua! What’s going on, man? This is a waste of time. Let’s attack ’em and get it over with.”

On the fourth day they march around again. And nothing happens.

This time some garbage flies over the wall. The people of Jericho are shouting insults at the people of God.

On the fifth day the same thing. On the sixth day the same thing.

But on the seventh day, on the seventh trip around the city, the horns start to blow and the people let out a shout.

And in one miraculous moment, “the walls came a tumbling’ down.”

That’s it. That’s how faith works.

Don’t you think there were some doubters? Don’t you think there were some critics?

Don't you think there was some grousing in the ranks?
Probably.

Complaining seems to be part of human nature.

These are real people who are tramping around in the hot sand day after day. It's hot and nasty and extremely frustrating.

But they did it. *That's "acting on the belief part."*

And when they took the step of faith, God honored it and the walls of Jericho fell to the ground.

b) Impossible, Difficult, Done

J. Hudson Taylor, a man of dynamic faith whose missionary efforts helped open China to the gospel.

Time and again he saw God do amazing things in the face of hopeless circumstances.

Reflecting on his experiences, he remarked that "there are three stages in most great tasks undertaken for God: Impossible . . . Difficult . . . Done."

But often God lets us struggle and sweat so that we learn to trust in him at a deeper level than ever before.

It's not hard to see why we think that way.

After all, when we work for God, our motives are lifted to a higher plane. We search the Scriptures, we seek godly counsel, we pray for guidance, and we believe that God is pleased with our efforts. And still things move slowly.

What we thought would take weeks takes months. And sometimes months turn into years. Enthusiasm lags, we feel stuck in the mud, the curious become skeptical and critical, and doubt takes dead aim at our faith.

Why should it be so? Couldn't the Lord set it up another way?

The answer's that He could—and sometimes He does.

But often God lets us struggle and sweat so that we learn to trust in him at a deeper level than ever before.

Most of us spend most of our days looking at a wall of impossibility.

The bad news is that it really is impossible.

The good news is that God loves to start with impossibility.

When God wants to do something big, he starts with something very small.

When He wants to do the miraculous, he starts with the impossible.

The real battle of Jericho was not with the Canaanites.

The real battle was in the hearts of the people of God.

After all, when He sent His Son to the world, He didn't send Him to New York or Chicago or even to Rome.

He sent Him to a little village called Bethlehem.

God loves to start small because then He can show His power in a mighty way.

He also is the only one who gets the credit because most of us don't want the credit for small beginnings.

We'd rather start big and go from there.

Not so with our Heavenly Father. He starts with the impossible and then turns it into reality.

c) Joshua and Jesus

The real battle of Jericho was not with the Canaanites. The real battle was in the hearts of the people of God.

Would they believe what God had said?

Would they risk public humiliation if the walls didn't come down?

Would they do what seemed absurd (from a human point of view) in order to see God do the impossible?

We all know that we live in difficult times.

In just a few days America will decide a hotly-contested election.

And within a week one man will have won and the other will have lost.

I heard someone say on TV that fear is driving voters.

I am sure that is true because the world feels shaky around us.

Some people have lost half their savings in the last six weeks. Others have lost their jobs.

And beyond the noise and clamor that attends every election, and beyond the economic crisis, we remain "frail children of dust, and feeble as frail."

We are glad that the Almighty remembers that we are but dust (Psalm 103:14).

We are like the grass of the field—here today and gone tomorrow.

Our text tells us that it was "by faith" the mighty walls of Jericho fell to the ground.

But how will we face and conquer our own walls of impossibility?

Where do we find the faith?

If we move on to Hebrews 12, we find the answer very clearly.
"Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith"
(v. 2).

He is the author and finisher of our faith.

He starts it and he finishes it.

He's the Captain of our salvation.

Just keep your eyes on him.

The Old Testament name for Jesus is Joshua!

The name Joshua means "God saves" in Hebrew.

In Greek it was shortened to "Jesus" or "Savior."

The Old Testament Joshua points us to the Lord Jesus Christ who leads his people to victory.

Keep your eyes on him!

Look to Jesus!

Follow him wherever he leads!

When Jesus leads the way, the walls must come tumbling down.

This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.