

Prayers

Opening prayer

Jesus; great and wonderful Lord, calm my spirit this day I pray. I place my hope in You because You know my future, and You are always there to guide me along the path I tread. Stay close, Lord Jesus, not because I ask it, but because You have promised to be with me; my Guide, my Counsellor and my Friend. Thank You. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: The Future

1. For yourself

Ask the Lord to help you perceive the future He has for you and not just the future you can see

2. For your friends and family

Pray that God will bless your friends and family with the love, friendship and companionship, which marks out those who love the Lord. Pray especially for those who do not own His love

3. For the church and its work

Pray that the church will catch a vision of all that God would have it do in the future. Pray that the church will be God's servant in the world, and show Him to all in word and deed.

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for the future of the world, especially now, remembering the damage done to the environment by the pollution of its air, its land and its seas.

Meditation

Gracious Lord God, You have lifted us up:

We needed Your help

And You responded immediately.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have held us close:

We needed Your touch,

And You came with healing power.

Holy Spirit, You have breathed into us new life:

We needed Your renewal

And You showed the power of Your care.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You have loved us:

Before we even knew our need,

You were ready to help us in any way You could.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Joshua 6: 1-11

¹ Now Jericho was under siege by the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in. ² The LORD said to Joshua,

'Look, I have delivered Jericho along with its king and soldiers into your hands. ³ All the warriors must march around the city once, and you must do this for six days, ⁴ with seven priests bearing seven rams' horn trumpets in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When

they give a long blast on the trumpets, then at the sound of this signal, all the people must call out with a great shout; and the wall of the city will collapse, and everyone will be able to charge straight ahead.'

⁶ So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and told them to take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and have seven priests carry seven rams' horn trumpets in front of it. ⁷ He ordered the people to go up and march around the city, with the armed men marching in front of the ark of the LORD. ⁸ And so, just as Joshua had commanded, the seven priests carrying the seven rams' horn trumpets in front of the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD behind them. ⁹ The armed men went in front of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁰ Joshua gave the people this command:

'You must not shout or raise your voices or speak a word, until the day I tell you to shout; then you will shout!'

¹¹ So he made the ark of the LORD go around the city once. Then they came back into the camp and spent the night there.

Review

The book of Joshua begins to burst into life with chapter six, with the story of the battle for Jericho. First of all, the Lord gave instructions to Joshua for a military action that was essential to the success of the taking of the Promised Land, and just as for the crossing of the Jordan, the Lord's instructions had to be obeyed if God's people were to enjoy success. The first paragraph in our passage describes these instructions (6:2-5), and then the second paragraph describes Joshua's giving of these commands to Israel (6:6f.) and the first day's action (6:8-11).

However, it is quite clear that this was no mortal battle, and the instructions had little military significance. Christians of past generations have attempted to make a case for the success of the battle based upon the weakening of the walls by the trampling of the army around it for seven days, or the fright of the citizens inside at the sound of the trumpets, or the fear of not knowing when the Israelites would eventually attack. None of this is relevant. The battle was spiritual because it was controlled by the Lord, and the Israelites were successful because they obeyed the commands they were given. We miss the point of this whole story if we fail to appreciate how important it was for the people to be obedient, and the point is made stronger by the fact that after the battle for Jericho, the next battle at Ai (Ch.7) was tainted by the people's disobedience, and consequently, it was initially unsuccessful.

There is considerable symbolism in the story. To begin with, the city of Jericho is described as 'shut up' (6:1), using an emphatic Hebrew word also used in 2:5 for the closing of the city gates when the spies hid with Rahab. Ever since the Israelites came out of Egypt they bore a message, which was that their God was greater than the Egyptian gods. Rahab had accepted this message that the Lord God was to be obeyed. The shutting of the gates of Jericho symbolised the rejection of this message by the rest of the city; for the king of Jericho and his people, all apart from Rahab and her family, would not accept the coming of Israel into Canaan, and they stood in the way of the Lord. It was therefore important that the means of winning Jericho was not mere force of arms, but the force of spiritual obedience to the One who now claimed Canaan for His own people.

So it is that Jericho was overcome not so much by the cunning of a military exercise but by the observation of a religious ritual. You will recall that just prior to chapter 6, we read that the people of Israel celebrated the Passover meal (5:10-12). The original instruction for the Passover (Exodus 12) indicates that the Passover was to be a weeklong festival with repeated festivities for seven days before the final celebration at the end. It is no coincidence that the battle at Jericho has the same format! The presence of the Lord, in the form of the ark, was paraded around Jericho to the accompaniment of ram's horn trumpets blown by priests. Now, some translations suggest that these trumpets were used to give battle signals, and the call for the people to shout (6:10) refers to a war cry. However, no such thing is indicated in the Hebrew, for all the sounding of trumpets and shouts were really features of the ancient worship of God. So, as the Israelites obeyed the Lord's commands and paraded around the city on the first day (6:11), what they did was more like a form of worship to God than any military manoeuvre. In verse 2, the Lord said to Joshua 'I have delivered Jericho ... into your hands'. The Hebrew verb used here is the 'perfect', indicating that the job was already done, and in order to take hold of a victory already granted, all that the people had to do was worship God according to His instructions!

In the next study, we will look in more detail at the surrounding of Jericho and the conclusion of the battle. However, the message of our passage is clear; God's people win their battles by being obedient to Him. To

this day, Christians find themselves in various situations of battle with evil and with the forces of this world that oppose God. They can never win by fighting hard in their own strength. They can only win where God has already granted victory, and communicated this through giving His word about how to make the victory real and how to accomplish it. Of course, it is likely that any victory, as at Jericho, will be achieved through the worship of the Lord.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group what you believe to be the meaning of the instructions given to Joshua about the coming battle of Jericho.
2. How do we win spiritual battles today? What situations in your own life illustrate the spiritual principles of this passage?
3. How do God's people demonstrate the presence of the Lord in their midst, now that we do not have the ark of the covenant?

Discipleship challenges

- *Reflect on how many times in your life you have had to fight a hard and difficult spiritual battle. What have been the principles by which you have won such battles, and where have you let yourself and God down? It can take some courage to work through such a question, but it is worth it.*
 - *Pray for those who find it hard to accept that 'battle' is a principle from which Christians can learn, even if they are pacifists! Pray that God's people will take up a stance against the evils of our world and be prepared to fight them.*
-

Final Prayer

God of grace and God of mercy; we find it hard to live each moment of our lives conscious of Your presence and trusting in Your love. Be gracious to us and come upon us in power; and by the gift of Your Holy Spirit, transform our attempts to do what is right so that we live by faith every moment of our days. Thanks be to God: AMEN
