

# Sermon Text for September 26, 2021

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*John 9:1-7, Joshua 6:8-21*

*“Joshua fought the battle of Jericho”*

Three of us from First Pres went to Dallas to a conference on basically worship and technology, and it was super helpful. It taught us that we were doing a lot of things well, and there are a number of things, even simple things, that we can do better that would make a big difference. Every time I go to a conference like this, Leo called it a mountain top experience, and you want to be able to spread the Gospel and tell people about Jesus and you want to see God at work specifically through you.

There and back we got rides to and from the airport with an Uber, I had never done it so consistently before, like relied upon it. So, after the conference I thought in my mind, this is my opportunity for God to use me, I'm going to make sure that this Uber driver is given an opportunity to meet Jesus through me, so we talked and I was convinced that God was going to do something powerful because I had just gone to a conference and I was the right person. And when he dropped us off we all gathered around him, and, I knew the Holy Spirit was going to work powerfully because we were present, God was going to use us then and there, and as we gathered together in that circle around him, he gave us our luggage and we went into the terminal and got on the plane.

I have no idea what happened with that Uber driver. The fact of the matter is that God's kingdom is going to increase, it is going to multiply, God's will is going to be done, but we often want to be the ones who see Jesus lifted high by our actions, by what we do not for the sake of the kingdom, but for our own sake. It is easy for those who work in this setting in which we find ourselves to get a bit frustrated because we don't see results of our actions. That's why I love to mow, I see an immediate result of my action. But with Jesus, so much has to be left to faith and trusting in the promises when Jesus says that I will increase whether you see it by the work of your hand or not.

Both of our Scriptures today address God at work in a way that only God can be given the credit for what has taken place. A man born blind and through that man God's power can be revealed. A wall tumbles to the ground as a result of trumpets and shouts. In this age of each one of us demanding that our right, our actions, our desires be respected, God tells us to shush, Christians, just shush, you are not here for your sake, but for mine. Joshua didn't actually fight

the battle of Jericho, but God did. Let's read and see if we can replace our desire to be lifted high with John the Baptist's encouragement to decrease so that Jesus can increase.

## **READ**

In the first century it was understood that every illness, every disease, every event that took place which was negative in your life, no matter what it was, was a result of sin either because of the individual who sinned, or those in his family who sinned who then that individual was paying the price. So a person born blind was a bit more problematic because as an infant it couldn't have been that person's fault, so it had to be the parent's fault. Whose fault was it Jesus? Jesus answers and gives us the theme for this morning, so hear these words: All of us have a purpose on this earth, including the man born blind, and that purpose is, vs.3: "so that God's works might be revealed in him." We exist, full of sin and full of disease, and illness and hurt and shame, and anger and whatever else you might want to throw in there, for the sole purpose of revealing God's work through our lives, even as we struggle with that whole list of messy things.

Our purpose as a church, our purpose as individuals in all that we do here and at home, is so that God's works might be revealed through us. Is that happening? Think about the decisions that you make about your finances, your family, your politics, you name it, it all has to be for the purpose of God being glorified so that God's will be done, and not our own individual wills and desires and understanding that we are at the center of all that takes place. We are not, we are not called to glorify others or ourselves, we are called to glorify God first and foremost.

But doesn't God need a little help from his friends. Surely we are called to take the initiative and not just wait around for God to do his thing? The man born blind did nothing on his own, but rather just followed Jesus' command, go, wash, and he did, and he was healed.

We find Joshua following the same protocol. He did not ask for help from God. He did not get on his knees and say: God, we are about to go into battle, give me a plan. No, like Jesus, God tells him what to do, God gives him the steps that he has to take just like Jesus gave them to the man born blind. We don't need a prophet to tell us what God is doing in our midst today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The man born blind, Joshua, and we are able to hear the voice of God which never contradicts his holy Scripture.

Sometimes we think that we have to do something of our own initiative to give God a boost. God, I heard someone tell me that you have called us to act in a certain way that may contradict your Scripture, either through violence, or through deceit, or through putting people in danger, so I'm just going to go ahead and take that initiative and follow through on that. God

does not contradict himself, God brings about the victory through means that are consistent with his kingdom. Any initiative that we want to take that is contradictory to his Word, to the way that God does things, is from the devil.

Did you know that Jericho, the city of Jericho was the first battle that the Israelites were involved in after they crossed the Jordan River and into the promised land? Just in the chapter preceding we see the people raise their own crops and for the first time the manna stopped coming because they didn't need it anymore. They had to recircumsize the people because they had been in the wilderness for 40 years and none of that was done during that time. Can you imagine how much trust it took in God for your very first battle and to be given battle plans that involved blowing trumpets and marching around the city?

How much are you going to allow God to be glorified and how much will you insist on taking part in it in your own way? Isn't that the case with us as well? As we find ourselves all over the spectrum on our approach to this pandemic, in all of us there is a sense of being stir crazy, like the Israelites who have just gotten out of the wilderness, and we all want to take our own initiative and more often than not it is not for the glory of God but rather for the glory of Bob, for our own glory, for our desires to be met in spite of what maybe God is telling us. That was a temptation for Joshua and the Israelites. Come on, we haven't had a chance to go into battle for 40 years and that's who we are, a people who are good at battle. There is a reason why John the Baptist said that we have to decrease in order for Jesus to increase.

So God tells Joshua what to do. March, just march, you won't need your swords for a while. The city was about a half mile around, historically we know that area is prone to earthquakes and where Jericho is thought to be you find walls of the city flattened over and over again because of earthquakes. You know, the thing about earthquakes, even to this day, is that one can predict them, well, no one except, yes, God.

Joshua follows every step of what God tells him to do without inserting himself and his desires and his rights and his wishes and whatever else he may have created, he followed God's commands. His desire to make a name for himself never revealed itself. And this leadership also got every single citizen involved as well. We read that the priests, the warriors, and the people did everything that God commanded be done.

Yes, I will give the victory, God says, but in my own way. Today, a lot of people are trying to bring about a victory in their own way, and whenever we try to do that, we run up against the way of God. Hebrews 11:30 gives us an indication of what the central theme of this

story is all about, which we read in John as well. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell...” Jericho’s defeat was a great sign of Israel’s trust in God.

We also read in Zechariah 4:6 where God speaks to his people and says: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord of hosts.” Joshua doesn’t ask the Lord for advice, or look to justify his actions through Scripture, but rather God tells him in an unsolicited way of what needed to be done. Jericho’s conquest is set up as the prime example of obedience to divine command. What God said, Joshua did.

You see, the presence of God in our lives is never for our agenda to be fulfilled, even if we think it aligns with God’s agenda. It doesn’t. The presence of God in our lives is never for individual victories, but rather so God can be proclaimed through what God has done. The battle of Jericho was for the purpose of demonstrating revealing God’s works and establishing that the only way God can increase is by us decreasing. Anyone who wants to make themselves great, or their church great, or their nation great through their own power or through their own lies is of Satan, is of the devil, and is not of God.

Joshua didn’t fight the battle of Jericho, God did. Anyone who is trying to make a name for themselves is doomed to meet with our Creator whose goal is to manifest His works, not our works. At the conference I heard something that I knew, but it was stated in a way that I had never heard before. Did you know that every pastor is an interim pastor. There will always be someone who comes after him or her. Just like every volunteer is an interim volunteer at the church, just like every staff member is an interim staff member. There will always be someone who comes after us. If we operate as if we are the only ones who can bring about change or be faithful to God’s kingdom, then those who come after us are going to be at a tremendous disadvantage to help facilitate God’s kingdom.

Each one of us has to have a common goal, no matter who we are. That’s why the churches of Strasburg have decided to meet together because we recognize that our common goal is what unites us and has to be the center of our existence. Each one of us has to have the goal of the bride of Christ, not our own position, be the most important aspect of what we are doing. The reason why we see a fractured society around us, and the churches of Strasburg united, is because people and families have allowed outside influences to become the most important thing in their lives.

Allow God to fight the battles in your life as you reconcile to those around you and as you look for ways to reach out to your neighbor in love and peace. That, at least, will unify us and will sow the right kind of seed for God to work. Amen.