

The Power of God's Promise

Joshua 6:1-27

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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Before we get into Joshua 6, I want to add a couple of appendices to last Sunday's message. First, I commented on the news report of double masking in a joking manner. My point was how news reports can stir up fear in our lives. I didn't mean to make light of that.

Second appendices. I was a bit narrow with my illustrations of how the news, social media, and government reports can create fear gathering in worship in our lives. My illustrations centered too much on COVID. I should have used a wider range of sources from news reports, social media posts, and just simple talk among friends that can create fear in our lives.

When we get a steady diet of reports of the violence at the US capitol, threats to religious freedom, rumblings concerning freedom of worship, how churches in some states have just now been able to gather for worship, reports of critical race theory, reports on Black Lives Matter protests, a daily update on COVID cases and COVID deaths, antagonism toward Christianity and Christians, *we may begin to get fearful about gathering for worship*. The news media and social media will prey on our natural concerns. They try to gen-up fear in order to tempt us to be fearful as we are gathering for worship now and as we look toward to a normal worship gathering in the future.

Brothers and sisters, the elders, and I are concerned about how we eventually transition back to our normal worship gathering. Also, we have ministries that are for the good of our body that we need to relaunch. It is a challenging time for our church and its leaders and all churches, for that matter.

Brothers and sisters, we must be strong and courageous. We must be ready. We must be equipped. We must be prepared to eventually resume our normal worship gatherings.

My aim last Sunday was to warn us and to challenge us, and prepare us for the future. We must remain unified around the priority of the gospel so that when the time is right, we can resume our regular worship gatherings.

However, my narrow application and illustrations may have sounded like I was saying that those who are live-streaming our worship services right now are not making the worship gathering a priority. I can see how that may have been heard. I did not mean to imply that. So, for that, please forgive me. That was not my intention.

I think we all agree that worshipping online long-term is not ideal. However, right now, it is necessary for some of our members. That being said, we need to *"pray for," "long for,"* and *anticipate* the time when we will all gather again soon.

The elders are looking ahead and trying to figure out when that time maybe. Pray for us. We need wisdom.

We should all be *uncomfortable* with the way things are right now. Those that are here should miss the ones that are not here. They should pray for them and reach out to them. Those who are not here should long to be with those who are here. They should pray for those who gather and reach out to them whenever possible.

So, until we can all meet together again, we need to be attentive to one another, patient with one another, kind to one another, giving one another the benefit of the doubt but also challenging one another *to be strong and courageous* as we press forward.

Brothers and sisters, the elders, and I love you, and we long for the time when we can all gather together in worship. Let's pray for that day to come quickly.

As we move forward, we will need to hear the message of Joshua, and let's be *strong and courageous* and let's prepare wherever we have gathered for worship this morning. You can do that here, and you can do that at home.

Brothers and sisters, the people of Israel, had to have concerns as they prepared to move forward with God. They had to have anxieties about entering the Promised Land.

They may have looked back and seen all that God had done for them in the past and marveled at the power of God but then also wondered, *"Will this be the time when the other shoe drops and God leaves me hanging?"*

Have you ever had that thought? I have. Have you ever thought, *"I know God has taken care of me in the past, but I don't deserve for Him to keep taking care of me, so that was probably the last time, and this time I will get what I deserve? His mercy toward me has got to run out."*

If you have never had that thought, then you are way ahead of me, and I praise God for you because you encourage me. Unfortunately, by default, I am what people call a *"Second-guesser."* I have struggled with that my whole life, and I still struggle at times. Praise God; I am not as bad as I used to be sometimes; I still fall in the *Pit of Second Guessing*.

God began to break that in me when Stacy and I went from no kids to having twins. Also, God has used 30 years of ministry to get my attention.

My kids and ministry have simply revealed my weaknesses, but it was and is the precious promises of God that put steel in my theological spine. The steady intake of God's promises over a lifetime pushes me to be *strong and courageous*. I pray the powerful promises will do the same for you.

Here are my three points: The promise is made, the promise is obeyed, and the promise is kept.

I. The Promise is Made (Joshua 5:13-6:5; 2:12-14)

We need to go back to Joshua 5:13-15, from last Sunday. So, let me read it.

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" ¹⁴ And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" ¹⁵ And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Here we find Joshua's meeting with the angel of the Lord, who is the Commander of the Lord's Army. The Commander has His sword drawn and is ready for battle. Then Joshua asks, *"Are you for us or for our adversaries?"* This is not a bad question, but the Commander does not answer Joshua.

He simply says, *"No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come."* Then Joshua realized who He was talking to and fell on his face in worship.

The big question is: *Who is the angel?* There are three possibilities. First, this was an angel on a special assignment from God. God had promised to send His angel before Israel to clear their way into the Promised Land. In Exodus 23:20-23, Yahweh told His people:

Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. ²¹ Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. ²² “But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³ “When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out.

So, this is the angel promised from Exodus 23. However, is he only an angel? If he was only an angel on special assignment, why did Joshua worship him, and why did the angel not stop Joshua from worshipping Him.

When you look through Scripture and find where a person begins to worship an angel, and it is only an angel, the angel stops that person. For example, in the Gospels and in Revelation, when God’s people tried to worship an angel, the angel stopped them. So, this angel must have been more than an angel.

Second, was the angel a theophany? A theophany is a theological word that describes a manifestation of God’s presence in the Old Testament in a kind of angelic form. For example, Moses’ encounter with the burning bush is a theophany.

Finally, was the angel a Christophany? A Christophany is a theological term that refers to a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, in the Old Testament in angelic form.

So, which is it? Verse 15 helps us. When we hear the Commander of the Lord’s Army command Joshua to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground, Joshua had to think of Moses’ encounter with Yahweh at the burning bush. It definitely was a manifestation of God’s divine presence in some form.

I think what we see in vv. 13-15 is a Christophany. The pre-incarnate Christ is mediating for God and His people. I think we find the pre-incarnate Jesus, as the Divine Warrior. He is leading God’s people into battle and into the Promised Land. He permits Joshua to worship Him because He is the second person of the Trinity. He is God.

Now that Joshua knew who he had met, the Commander of the Lord’s army—he needed marching orders. Let’s look at Joshua 6:1:

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

Verse 1 is not simply a transition, but it tells us that Joshua’s mission is an impossible mission. Without Yahweh fighting for Israel, there was no way they could breach the walls.

Next, in v. 2, the Lord tells Joshua that He has delivered on His promise to give Jericho into their hands. Before the battle has even started, Yahweh reminds Joshua of His promise by giving it in the past tense.

² And the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.

Although the promise was given in past tense, God’s people still needed to be *strong and courageous* and act with faith in God’s powerful promise. Notice what it says in vv. 3-5:

³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

What was it going to take for them to taste the goodness of God's promise? They had to be *strong and courageous and trust the promise of God to deliver them.*

Think about it: They knew the power of the promises of God. They had seen and tasted the faithfulness of God in the wilderness. They had seen Jordan River parted BUT NOW that they must march around the Jericho and then take up their swords and fight. *Now they must be strong and courageous and trust the promise of God because this plan had to seem like it would not work.*

This plan probably sounded as strange back then as it does today. However, that was God's plan of salvation for His people. That was His plan to deliver His enemies into hands.

It is no different today. Salvation earned by the Son of God sounds strange today.

Think about the strange message of the Gospel. God's promise calls us to place our faith in a Savior who said He is the fulfillment of everything in the Old Testament. God's promise says that Jesus' life earned our righteousness before God and His death would paid the penalty of our sin on the cross. Then He was buried, and on the third day, he rose from the dead. Those who confess their sin to God and repent of that sin and by faith look to Jesus are saved from the wrath of God and saved to eternity in Heaven. This is a strange plan of deliverance.

The Greeks called this kind of talk foolishness, and the Jews said this was a stumbling block. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:20-25:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Do you know what we know today that ancient Israel did not know? We know the Commander of the Lord's Army—The Divine Warrior—The Lord Jesus Christ who laid down His life on the cross and rose from the dead. The Commander of the Lord's Army says, *"Look to Me. Fix your eyes on Me. I will save you, and I will fight for you if you will trust Me. I promise that I will never leave you or forsake you. I will be with you to the end of the age."*

It takes faith to trust Jesus and believe in the gospel. What Jesus has done to save His people is so different than any other religion in the world. All other religions call you to work and earn.

They say you must—DO. This is a standard religious strategy. But Jesus says, *“I have done it for you. Past tense—it is finished! I have done everything for you. I fulfilled the Law of God for you. I paid for your sin on the cross and all Hell was poured out on Me. I took your punishment. I have forgiven you of your sin. All you need to do is trust Me. I love you. I will save you. I want to have a relationship with you. I want you to know Me and enjoy the promises and blessings of God. Be strong and courageous and look to Me.”*

Friend, have you turned from your sin and turned to Jesus? Are you trusting in Him today as your Lord and Savior?

Brother and sister in Christ, our Divine Warrior is still fighting our battles for us. Are you obeying the instructions He gives you? Are you looking to your Warrior King as He fights for you?

II. The Promise is Obeyed (Joshua 6:6-20)

Pastor Eric read vv. 6-16, and what we see in these verses is Israel’s obedience to the instructions God gave them.

In vv. 6-9, we learn that the people of God obeyed the instructions given to them. Yahweh was going to knock down the wall, but He commanded His people to devote Jericho to destruction.

In vv. 10-14, the people patiently and trust God to accomplish His promise. Listen to vv. 10 & 14:

But Joshua commanded the people, “You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout.” . . .¹⁴ And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

The people obeyed the promise of God and patiently waited on God to knock down the walls.

Joshua and Israel could have approached this battle according to *standard military strategies*, but they did not. They trusted in the promise of God to deliver them, so they marched around the wall with the trumpets blowing, and the people did not utter one word.

The people were trusting in an all-wise, all-powerful God to keep His promise. Marching around the walls of Jericho may have seemed strange, but it was a battle. It was the battle of faith. Would Israel be *strong and courageous* and put their confidence in God’s promise.

Brothers and sisters, we must do the same thing. The fact is we have an enemy who loves to steal, kill, and destroy our confidence in God. The enemy will keep you from what God has called you to do. The enemy will tell you that it is foolish to obey Jesus’ plan for your life. The enemy will question the wisdom of following God into hard places.

In his book, *I Can Plod: William Carey the Early Years* John Appleby talks about William Carey’s call to missions in India. He said there were two complications to Carey being called to missions and particularly to India. Number one: *Carey was allergic to sunshine. It did not seem wise for Carey to go to a place where the sun is continually shining.* Number two: *He was a shoemaker, and he worked with leather. That profession was despised in India. Only the lowest caste of people worked with leather.*

Appleby says, *“Is it not surprising that someone allergic to sunshine and being a leatherworker as well should have been sent by [God’s] Providence to spend a lifetime in India where the former is constant, and the latter is a trade of the despised lower caste?”*

By most missionary standards, William Carey would be unfit for service in India. However, God knows better, and indeed He used William Carey in a mighty way to bring the gospel to India and glory to God.¹

Friends, what is impossible with man is possible with God. Who would have thought that the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would give us new life and a relationship with Almighty God? No one!!

Brothers and sisters, God and His people, have an enemy in Satan. He wants to steal, kill, and destroy your confidence in God. Satan would love for you to build tall solid walls in your heart to keep the truth of God out and guard the lies he whispers in your heart and mind. He wants you to nurture lies like: *“God would never save you,”* or *“God is going to let me down,”* or *“You are too far gone. There is no hope of you ever-changing or having victory of your sin.”*

Better yet, Satan will try to convince you that you can fix yourself. He will try to convince you that God’s word is insufficient and what you need is man-made tactics, strategies, and wisdom. Then what you learn is that none of these strategies ever work.

If you are not a Christian, you realize you are still lost and without hope.

If you are a Christian, you realize that you have reached the end of your rope, and nothing has worked. You are still the same old person you were, but now you are even more miserable.

However, I’ve got good news for you. By the power of the promise of the word of God, the walls of your heart will flatten and like Rahab who was in midst of the wall of Jericho, He will show you great mercy and save you. This leads me to my last point.

III. The Promise is Kept (Joshua 6:20-27)

There are two promises that were kept in vv. 20-27. First, the city was destroyed by the walls being knocked flat. This was the beginning of the judgment that God had promised to bring on the Canaanites four hundred years earlier. Verse 20 says quite plainly:

So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city.

The second promise kept is the one made to Rahab and her household. Verse 25 says:

But Rahab the prostitute and her father’s household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

In the judgment of Jericho and the deliverance of Rahab, we see shadows of the *ultimate promise* of God to judge the wicked and save the righteous.

What we must come to terms with in Scripture is that Yahweh is glorified in both judgment and salvation. His glory is not diminished in His judgment on sin and sinners, nor does His glory shine brighter in the mercy of salvation. God is most glorious when He upholds His holiness and justice. God is glorified when He punishes the wicked for their sin and shows mercy to sinners He has chosen to save.

¹ John Currid, *Strong and Courageous*, 96-97; John Appleby, *I Can Plod: William Carey and the Early Years of the First Baptist Missionary Society*.

It is true that God takes no pleasure in the judgment of the wicked, but that does not mean He will set aside His holiness and justice and allow the wicked to go unpunished for their sin. God is infinitely holy! God is infinitely righteous! He will judge sin.

What we find in vv. 20-27 is that God in His mercy had allowed the sin of the people of Canaan to go on for four hundred years. Now the time was up. It was time for judgment.

Dr. R.G. Lee was the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN, many years ago. He preached a sermon that became famous called *"Payday Someday."* For the people of Canaan, payday had come.

The fact is that day will come for all of us. Our lives will be called into account, and we will be judged for our sin against God. There will not be one sin that will go unpunished. Every sin will be called into account, and judgment will be given.

The question is, where will that judgment fall. If you reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by not turning from your sin and placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you will pay for your sin in Hell for all eternity. That is where the judgment for your sin will fall.

However, if you turn to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance, then the full judgment of Hell for your sin has been poured out on Christ when He died on the cross. He was your substitute. Like Rahab, in the midst of judgment, you will receive the mercy of Christ. Look to Jesus today while there is still time.