

Sermon June 18, 2023 – The Call to Battle

Father's Day. **Scriptures:** Joshua 6:6-16_ Mark 10:45-52

I grew up in a houseful of girls, no brothers, so I was amused when a woman told me about a conversation she had with her son. It highlighted how different it is raising boys. Her son confided, *"every time I meet another kid, first thing, I find myself looking him over and wondering if I could beat him in a fight."* Really? As if a challenge could be issued at any minute! He went on: "I figure if **I** couldn't beat him, Dad could!" Yay Dad! The Lord has ordained fathers to take the role of protector in the family. They are to protect their children physically, spiritually, and emotionally. They are the watchmen on the wall. They issue the call to battle when someone or something threatens the child or the family. They teach their children how to handle problems.

I thought, "Isn't that the same way we should think about our heavenly father when confronted with life's battles?" King David said in Psalm 144:1 *Blessed be the Lord, my Rock and my great strength, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle.*

I may not feel able to cope with every battle, but I KNOW my heavenly father will step in if I call him. Whether you're battling to overcome your past, to climb the ladder of success, or to conquer physical or mental illnesses, God wants you to call on him for help. If we let down our defenses, the enemy can imprison us in addiction, or fear, or in a mound of debt. When you work in business, you constantly battle for resources, for time, for attention, for profit or for power. As children we were trained to battle for "truth, justice and the American Way". As parents we battle for influence over our kids' beliefs & choices.

Some days we fight battles on many fronts: personal and public. The media feeds us bad news every day. Headlines foster intergenerational warfare, or race and class warfare, eroding the culture of mutual trust and collaboration that made our country unique. The church of Jesus Christ is the only force powerful enough to unite people from different groups, to break down the enemy's strongholds, and to restore love and trust between people. We need to start every day focused on Faith news not fake news. God has equipped us for the battle: with his love, his grace, his Word and his Holy Spirit. He has placed his seal on each of us. When you are *in Christ*, YOU ARE POWERFUL! As a church, we wield Christ's power to change the culture, one saved soul at a time.

Don't listen to the enemy. He'll tell you that you don't have what it takes to win the battle. You're not good enough, strong enough, smart enough or

faithful enough. He'll tell you that you'll be crushed or publicly embarrassed if you rely on God to help you win your battle. He's a liar! Consider today's scriptures. Joshua 6: Can you imagine the murmuring among the troops when Joshua told his army to take the Ark of the Covenant and just march around the walls of Jericho, not saying a word, just marching around the city 7 times and then going back to camp, without a single call to battle? Surely a few of them were thinking, "this guy has lost it! I think he's been hit in the head one too many times. He must have left out a couple steps in God's plan. What will the enemy think if we just parade around and never challenge them? Let's at least talk some smack and show them we're not intimidated by their giant walls!" Joshua didn't let that deter him. He knew something that we would do well to learn: You don't have to understand the rationale behind God's instructions, you just have to OBEY them! If God says, "*Don't repay evil with evil*" then he means it. But we tend to rebel, thinking "I'm not going to let that jerk get away with messing with me!" Right? Remember, God told us, *My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are higher than your thoughts!* "Is retaliation 'loving your neighbor'?" Just do what God says and ignore the mockery from the world. Stop rebellious thoughts in their tracks! Who is more trustworthy: men or God?

The world will tell you that God doesn't exist, and if he did exist he wouldn't let people get away with all the evil they do. He sure wouldn't do much for sinners like you! Even some well-meaning Christians will encourage you to have a backup plan. If they haven't seen a miracle themselves, they aren't sure God will come through for someone ordinary; surely God helps those who are holier than you, or who pray more than you or whatever. Nonsense! God loves to use the foolish to confound the wise. Don't be afraid to look foolish when you're following God. After looking like idiots by marching in circles for 6 days, on the 7th day Joshua's men blew the trumpet, let out a shout and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down! Every expert would have said it's impossible, yet the unbreachable, 10 ft. thick, impregnable walls of the enemy's great stronghold crumpled like a dried out flower as that one shout of faith activated the power of God.

What if after the fourth day Joshua had listened to the men grumbling and the women laughing and he'd compromised and started to build a battering ram? He'd have wasted a lot of time, effort and material and he might have forfeited his miracle. The men weren't evil, they were just looking at the facts, seeing with worldly eyes. The walls WERE 10 ft thick and unlikely to crumble on their own anytime soon, but Joshua wasn't asking for facts. He was asking for Faith. If you want the victory, you have to hold onto the vision. God knows the FACTS, he wants FAITH. The battle begins in the spirit. God's timing is not dependent on OUR deadlines. Even when you're tempted to give up, keep expecting your miracle. God can break down any

stronghold the devil devises. Just ask Him. God LOVES YOU unconditionally. He wants what's best for you.

Suppose you're battling arthritis and you see a testimony on Christian TV from someone who says, I started seriously studying God's words about healing, praying and taking communion every day, and one morning I woke up and I was completely healed! You tell your Christian friends about this and they say, I hope you're not thinking this is the way for YOU to go! That's the exception, not the rule. Today God only uses doctors to heal. Don't limit God! Pull out your Bible and re-read the story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus that we heard this morning. He was a nobody! The writer just gives him the one name -Bartimeus or 'son of Timaeus', without any first name. Perhaps his family was dead or his family cast him out. We don't know. Maybe it was one of those first names that no one wants to use, like Mahershalalhashbaz (mentioned in Isaiah 8:3, meaning he hurries to plunder. Anyway, this son of Timaeus was made famous for stepping out in faith.

As Mark writes about this event, he says, "They (meaning the disciples) were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way." That's the way to travel folks, letting Jesus lead the way. You'll never get lost if Jesus is leading you. Too often, WE want to lead while HE follows. That's backwards and will only lead to trouble. When you let Jesus lead you, good things happen.

So back to our story, they're on the way to Jerusalem and they came to Jericho. Now remember, Joshua conquered Jericho over 500 years before Jesus, and afterwards, he put a curse on it so that whoever attempted to rebuild it would be punished by the death of his son. Well, in those days a king demonstrated his power and wealth by his building projects. It was a type of legacy. We're told in 1 Kings 16:34 that despite the curse, *King Ahab had Hiel of Bethel rebuild 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 on Nun."* There is always a penalty to pay for placing your own desires before the expressed demands of the Lord. Both Ahab & Hiel acted contrary to God's will and they paid the price.

So Jesus and his followers were passing through Jericho, rebuilt to be an oasis in the desert, a popular way station, like a truck stop for food and fuel located at the junction of several main routes. And Mark tells us that as they were leaving the city, the beggar Bartimaeus heard that it was Jesus passing by and he shouted, *Jesus Son of David have mercy on me!* And Jesus stopped in his tracks. Do you think _it is a coincidence that **both**

miracles take place in Jericho?? in Joshua's day, one big shout brought victory to God's people at Jericho and here, in Jesus' day, one loud shout brings victory over blindness to Bartimaeus. Joshua carried the ark of the covenant around the city walls and with a shout toppled a stronghold of the enemy. Jesus, the true ark, came to Jericho and at one man's shout, with grace and mercy toppled the stronghold of blindness imprisoning Bartimaeus, The people surrounding the beggar rebuked him when he started shouting to Jesus. I'll bet some of those telling him to shush were among those following Jesus, who were intent on getting where they had to go before nightfall, pumped up to be part of the prophet's posse, disgusted by a dirty, blind beggar on the roadside. Make way, important people coming through, no time to listen to the likes of you, they probably said. Haven't we all been guilty of that? Brushing someone off because our mind is focused on OUR agenda, our plans? We've done it to neighbors, certainly to panhandlers, and sometimes even to our kids, Right? Not Jesus. He not only stopped, he asked Bartimaeus, *What do you want me to do for you?*" No impatient tone. Jesus offers his grace even when you interrupt him. He's unconcerned with timetables, and he offers grace to this persistent, desperate man.

Bartimaeus' FAITH calls out to him as loudly as his voice and Jesus rewards that faith by restoring the man's sight. The willingness of Bartimaeus to ignore other people's censure, to be okay with looking foolish, brought him a miracle. _ Note that when Jesus called him, he 'threw his cloak aside', jumped up and ran to Jesus. In the same way, when Jesus calls you don't just sit there looking pitiful, asking six other people if you ought to take advantage of the opportunity. Get up, forget about the optics on social media, ditch the worn-out excuses of your old selves, and run toward Jesus. Listen only to HIS voice asking, *What do you want me to do for you?* Let His grace fill your spirit and manifest itself in the physical realm of your day-to-day life. I wonder, was Bartimaeus the only handicapped beggar at that gate or was he simply the only one who dared to risk rebuke or disappointment by shouting out to Jesus? Were there others who sat their quietly, envying Bartimaeus but too afraid to act? And notice too that when Bartimaeus says, "I want to see", Jesus didn't hesitate, saying "Let me check your file and I'll get back to you". He immediately restored the man's sight. He took that trip to Jericho for just that purpose - to reward a man's faith, to fulfill Isaiah's prophesy that the Messiah will bring sight to the blind, and to glorify God the Father.

How many blind people are walking around today -blind to the superficiality of the world's admiration, blind to the truth of God's word? Some may be in the sanctuary today. How many are stuck in strongholds of addiction, depression, greed, lust or fear but never call out to Jesus? These people not

only need to hear the voice of Jesus, They need to accept his offer of hope and salvation. ONLY through contact with Jesus can we break away from the things that are holding us captive, keeping us from becoming all God wants us to be. If you have NOT yet accepted Christ and your savior and want to change that today, please come see me after the service. When Jesus comes into your life, your vision is changed. You realize you're not worthy, but it's not all about YOU. You let His grace and mercy fill you. Too often we fall into the trap of thinking WE have all the answers, We try to fight the battle using conventional tactics, exhausting ourselves and frustrating God's plans. Wise up!! If you trust in him then grant him control, *Hebrews 11:30* says "*By FAITH the walls of Jericho fell down*".

Step out in faith like Joshua, and Jesus will fight your battles for you! By His death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, He's given you everything you need to triumph over trouble. His spirit lives in you. No more whining or complaining! Think like a victor not a victim! When your praise is greater than your pain, strongholds fall. Take out your trumpet, start praising God and shouting out your faith. Look in the mirror & remind yourself WHO YOU ARE in Christ. YOU are the child of the most high God, As a church, we are the bride of Christ. You don't need to beg for God's favor. He is a loving father who acts for your highest good. Be honest about your issues and turn to Him instead of Dr Phil when you need help. Consider the words of Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, A Warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with Joy." Glory Be to God!
And all God's children said AMEN.