

**“Carefully & Confidently:
Follow the Lord!”
Sermon on Joshua 5:13 – 6:5
Saint Mark's, Wttn, WI
Pastor Karl Walther
September 5, 2004**

The Lord once said to Joshua—and the Lord still says to us: *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration today begins September's sermon series on Joshua. It is Joshua chapter five, verse thirteen, through chapter six, verse five—the account of Joshua and Israel at Jericho. It's printed for you on the first inside page of your bulletin. And you'll find that I'll read, explain, and apply these verses throughout the sermon.

Introduction: War Is in the News

Dear fellow Christians—who are at war against Satan, and who will win the victory and secure the peace through Jesus Christ:

“War” is in the news more than usual, isn't it? American soldiers are stationed in Iraq, and the skirmishes there suggest that war isn't really over. America has been fighting a war on terrorists for three years now—minus a week or so. And we hear about all of this in triplicate, because these are chief issues in a very close presidential election.

Regardless of where you stand politically in regard to these wars, you'd have to admit: Americans' support for war is waning. The war against terrorists and the war in Iraq have gone on for years now, and we Americans grow tired of it. It's really true: we Americans display a distinct lack of endurance. And our enemies are probably counting on that, in order for them to gain the victory in the end.

Well, whether or not war were in the news these days, you are at war. For Christians, it has always been that way. And your enemies are hoping you will lose interest in the war, so that they can gain the victory over you. In contrast, you need endurance—a certain steadfastness to win your war and secure the peace.

**Theme: Joshua and Israel at Jericho Teach Us –
“Carefully and Confidently, Follow the Lord”**

That's the reminder we're going to get in God's Word to us this morning. Here: JOSHUA & ISRAEL AT JERICHO TEACH US: “CAREFULLY & CONFIDENTLY: FOLLOW THE LORD!”

Exposition: The Account of Joshua and Israel at Jericho

So, it was springtime, during the year fourteen hundred and six BC—three thousand, four hundred, ten and a half (!) years ago. It was some eight miles north of the Dead Sea and some five miles west of the Jordan River—a little ways up into the hills that would later lead to Jerusalem, fifteen miles west-southwest.

Israel: whom God had led out of Egypt forty years earlier, whom God had led through the desert during the past four decades, whom God had just led on dry ground

through the Jordan River at flood stage—those six hundred thousand Israelite families were camped at Gilgal. Joshua, a spry sixty-five years old or so, was now their leader.

And only a mile or two away was Jericho: a city an eighth of a mile by a quarter of a mile in size—and a population of (who knows?) some several thousands. It was a sort of a major city, a walled city—and walls in those days were ten to thirty feet thick and as much as twenty feet high. Good strong gates were set into those walls.

Jericho was the first of thirty-one cities the Lord was aiming to give over to Israel's armies. It was, so to speak, the gateway city to the promised land of Canaan.

With that in mind, we read: **Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand**—apparently ready for battle. Naturally, Joshua felt a responsibility to identify this warrior. So, we read: **Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"**

And the answer is very interesting. **"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."** Whoa! *The commander of the army of the Lord*, and especially his angel hosts—the commander of the army of the Lord is the Lord himself! And note how much he considers himself above the fray of this battle. "I am for *neither* side," he says—because he is for the salvation of the souls of all mankind.

Well, Joshua knew he stood in front of the Lord himself! because we read: **Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"** What an exemplary attitude, eh? "Lord, you are God, and I am your slave"—that's what Joshua is saying.

Now: **The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."** And Joshua did so. "This ground is holy because God is here! So, sandals that have tread other ground must not tread this ground." And Joshua was experiencing the very thing Moses had experienced forty years earlier on Sinai—when the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush.

Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. In other words, the couple double sets of big wooden swinging doors that led in and out of the city – probably even bigger than the doors into our church back there or over here to the side – those doors were locked solid. And no one had exited or entered the city for days, at least.

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men." What a gracious promise! And what sweet confidence it was!

But the siege would be an unusual one. The Lord continues: **"March around the city once with all the armed men."** It was a process that would probably take the better part of an hour. **"Do this for six days. Have seven priests** (and of course: "seven" often represented the reconciliation of the three-person God with his people from the four corners of the earth)—**Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns** (always used for signaling, never used for music) **in front of the ark** (that four foot by two foot by two foot acacia-wood chest, overlaid with gold, overshadowed by the two golden angels, and containing the tablets of the law and a jar of manna and Aaron's staff that had budded). The ark, of course, represented the presence of God himself—giving the victory.

And then: **On the seventh day, march around the city seven times** – that would take a full morning – **with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout** – without catapults, without siege ramps, without battering rams – **then the wall of the city will collapse** – that's three or four million pounds of wall, crumbling into dust – **and the people will go up, every man straight in."**

And of course, that's exactly what happened. A little later, on the seventh day, we read: *When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the*

trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.... Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord's house.

Application: Carefully and Confidently, Follow the Lord

And that's it. That's the account of Joshua and Israel at Jericho. They won their war! But how does all of this apply to us? How does all of this apply to you?

Well, you and I are – a lot – in the position of the Israelites. They had God's promise to give them a land flowing with milk and honey: the land of Canaan; we have God's promise to give us a land flowing with milk and honey: the heavenly land of paradise. The Israelites had something standing in their pathway on the way to that promised land: the city of Jericho and its inhabitants; you and I have something standing in our pathway to paradise: that something is Satan.

The devil is blocking our highway to heaven! If he can get us to sin – at all – we're no longer fit to enter into heaven. And of course, we've sinned lots! If he can get us to remain in sin, we'll never enter holy heaven. And what's the main trick he uses to get us to remain in sin? Well, he doesn't want us anywhere near God's Word.

So, we're in a war—a life-and-death, fierce-and-furious, winner-take-all war against Satan. And he's bigger and badder than the population of Jericho.

Fortunately, the Israelites had their Joshua – his very name means “rescuer” – to lead them to defeat the people of Jericho. And they did so without catapults, without siege works, without battering rams—but rather following God's orders and led by God's presence (in the form of the ark of the covenant). And then with the blast of some trumpets and a very loud shout: down came the walls, and the Israelites gained the victory.

So, what we need is a Joshua: somebody to relay to us God's orders, somebody through whom God will give us the victory over Satan, somebody to usher us into God's presence. Or else: our sins prevent us from paradise....

And Jesus is that greater Joshua we need. (Did you know that “Jesus” is New Testament Greek for “Joshua” in the Hebrew Old Testament?!) You see, Jesus sounded the signal, like that of the Israelites—the signal for us to lay out our sins before our Heavenly Father, for us to find forgiveness in him. Jesus gave the loud shout, like that of the Israelites—*“It is finished!” ...He cried out in a loud voice, and he gave up his spirit.* And an earthquake ensued, and down crumbled – not Jericho's walls, but – the curtain of the temple. And Jesus Christ ushered you and me into the presence of God eternally.

So, the battle is won! And you and I follow Jesus into the heavenly land of milk and honey.

Not, however, that future battles won't ensue. Joshua and the Israelites had thirty more cities to go! And God had proven he would give them every one. But they had to keep trusting him, and they had to keep following him—every time.

And it's the same for us. Future fights will ensue. Satan looks to battle us every single day. If we think that we no longer need to be concerned about him, that we no longer need to follow our commander Christ more closely every day, then he'll beat us tomorrow and drag us right back into hell.

That's why you need to train yourself every day with the weaponry of his Word. After all, soldiers don't just work on the days they go out to fight. No, they spend most of their time practicing and patiently waiting. And then when it is time to fight, they are

prepared, and they win. In the same way, you need to train yourself every day by reading the Scriptures. That way, every day, you will be able to repel the evil one's attacks.

Conclusion: Victory Is Ours in Our Spiritual Warfare

So, like I said: war is in the news more than usual. And Americans seem to be losing their taste for it. But given the high stakes of war – at least the war against the terrorists – such apathy is probably very dangerous.

My fellow Christian: you're at war. The bad news is: you can't win it on your own. The good news is: Christ has already won this war for you. The big news – on which you need to act – is that Satan is still out to get us. So, you need to cling to your commander Christ and train yourself with the weaponry of his Word every day.

That way, you have full assurance that you will survive forever, gain the victory everlastingly, and secure eternal peace—through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The Lord once said to Joshua—and the Lord still says to us: *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.* Amen.