

Welcome to Neighborhood! Today we CONCLUDE our Summer Series: CAMPFIRE STORIES. All summer, we have gathered around the campfire to re-tell the famous accounts of God's Grace & Power displayed throughout the Old Testament.

Our Campfire Story today is Joshua and the Battle of Jericho. If you have a Bible with you, please join me in the book of Joshua ch. 2. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible...toward the beginning of your Bible. Let me take a moment to go BACK and explain what took place BEFORE the book of Joshua:

- God chose Abraham and his family became the people of Israel
- God said He would bless Abraham's descendants and, some 400 years later, would bring them into the Promised Land (the land of Canaan)
- Well, the Israelites became enslaved in Egypt for many years.
- God raised up MOSES and through him, brought the Israelites OUT of their Egyptian slavery.
- God makes a covenant with His people on Mt. Sinai and brought them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.
- Israel is now camped outside the Promised Land

The book of Joshua picks up right after Moses dies and Israel is about to enter the land that God promised them centuries before. After the death of Moses, JOSHUA is appointed as Israel's new leader. Like Moses, Joshua sends spies to check out the land of Canaan.

*Joshua 2:1 (NKJV) Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.*

Jericho is on a mound about 10 acres in size. And it was a daunting fortress with tall, thick walls making it impossible to penetrate or capture. Jericho guarded the pass into the land of Canaan from the east.

Rahab - This woman is described as a harlot; a prostitute. She operates a small hotel...a place for travelers to lodge, maybe get a drink, maybe find some "companionship" (if you know what I mean). By no means is Rahab what you would call "a savory character". Let's just say you wouldn't ask Rahab to mentor your teenage daughter. But it's no mistake that the 2 spies arrive at Rahab's place. God wants to do a mighty work in & through Rahab's life.

Here's what happens next (Joshua 2:2-7): The king of Jericho gets wind that two spies from Israel have visited Rahab. Rahab is commanded, "BRING OUT THE SPIES!" But Rahab LIES and says: "Yes, the men were here but they left town." The truth is that Rahab protected the two Israelites and hid them on her roof!

*Joshua 2:8-11 (NKJV) Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*

Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, boldly confesses faith in the One True God! She is switching sides! (We call this "conversion.") Rahab is denouncing all the pagan gods of Canaan, aligning herself with the God of Israel.

*Joshua 2:12-13 (NKJV) Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."*

In hiding these spies, Rahab risked her own life and extended grace to these men. She then asks for grace from these men, that her family would be "delivered from death." Now she may have intended simply to be taken as prisoners...but that is NOT what happens.

We find that Rahab becomes the wife of a man named Salmon. Their son, Boaz, marries a woman named Ruth. Their son Obed has a son named Jesse who has a son named David...King David! Who comes from the line of King David? Jesus Christ, our Lord & Savior. God welcomes this lying prostitute, Rahab into His family...and through her line, the Savior of the world is born!

To paraphrase what happens next: The spies agree to spare Rahab and her family. They tell her to gather her family and to tie a scarlet rope from the window of her house (which happens to be on the city wall). This way they will know who to rescue during the coming attack on Jericho. The spies leave Rahab's house secretly, hide out in the desert for a few days, return to Joshua and tell him everything that happened to them.

Let's jump to Joshua chapter 5 for a mysterious encounter Joshua has prior to the Battle of Jericho.

*Joshua 5:13-15 (NKJV) And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.*

This Warrior that Joshua encounters turns out to be an angelic Commander of the Lord's army. Joshua wants to know whose side is this Warrior on? Are you for US? Or are you for our ENEMIES? To which the Warrior responds: "NO. (neither)" The real question is whether Joshua is on the Lord's side. The implication is that the LORD will fight the battle (by God's power, not man's). Joshua is to trust, obey, & wait upon God as He accomplishes His plan. Joshua understood that he was in the presence of God. Joshua falls to the ground says, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Joshua's posture is one of humility and obedience before the Lord. What message do you have for me? You have my ears...I will listen and obey what YOU say, Lord!

*Joshua 6:1-2 (NKJV) Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the Lord said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. Note the verb tense: "I have given Jericho into your hand." PAST TENSE! In God's eyes, the battle is already won.*

*Joshua 6:3-5 (NKJV) You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him."*

The Lord tells Joshua the plan...here's how to overcome the walls of Jericho. Can you imagine the conversation Joshua now has to have with his military council. "Oh, hey Joshua. We've been talking and we have some great ideas for how to beat Jericho: Larry says we should go OVER the wall using ladders, ramps, & pogo sticks (thank you, Larry). Bob thinks we should dig a tunnel UNDER the wall, so we might need a load of shovels and spoons (thanks, Bob.) Billy wants us to bash a hole THROUGH the wall using a battering ram. Bouregard has this crazy idea of hiding our soldiers inside a huge wooden horse and offering it as a gift to the king of Jericho (Bouregard needs a vacation, sir).

Then Joshua says: Men, we are NOT going OVER, UNDER, or THROUGH the wall, we're going to take the ark and march AROUND Jericho...then go home. We'll come out the next day and do the same thing...then go home. We'll do this for 6 days. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day, lace up your walking shoes because we're going to march around Jericho 7 times...the priest will blow the trumpets, we are all going to shout at the top of our lungs, and the wall of Jericho will crumble at our feet.

You have to admit: this is a STRANGE STRATEGY! It's not even a military strategy. It is ceremonial. It is more like an act of worship to God with the ark at the center of the procession. The ark was the visible symbol of God's presence among the Israelites. Having the ark at the center emphasizes that the conquest of Canaan was first and foremost the Lord's doing. God is teaching His people to trust Him instead of leaning on their own cleverness. Like Noah and the strange strategy of building a big boat. Like Gideon and the strange strategy of reducing his army of 32,000 to 300 men. Like the strange strategy of conquering the sin of the world by the death of Jesus on a cross. That the victory of Christ would come by way of execution on a device of shame and torture...that our Conquering King would come as a Suffering Servant. God's strategies for how we conduct ourselves can seem strange to an unbelieving world.

What about God's strategy for sex? God's desire is that we would steward our sexuality in ways that honor Him. That we would reserve ALL our romantic energy & behavior for our spouse. That we would only have sex in the context of the marriage covenant.

What about God's strategy for Money & Possessions? That we would give the first portion back to Him as an offering of gratitude and trust and that we believe in the mission of His church. That we would be generous people...sharing the resources that God has given us.

How about God's strategy of Humility instead of Self-Promotion? How can I get ahead in life if I don't promote myself over other people? Instead, God says "Humble yourself and I will lift you up."

Jr. High, Sr. High, and College Students: What about God's strange strategy of honesty & integrity in your studies? Oh, Trav...everybody cheats! What, God wants me to fail? No, God wants you to be a learner of things! Listen, all of God's strategies, what He lays out in His Word, are always GOOD and they point us to LIFE. God gives Joshua a strange strategy, but Joshua does not hesitate. He trusts God, does what He says, and waits upon the Lord. Joshua tells the priests & people about God's strategy for conquering Jericho. He tells the people that only Rahab and her family are to be spared. And they Trust God, Obey Him, and carry out this Strange Strategy: Six days in a row, they circle Jericho on their feet, carrying the ark.

Let's pick up the story in Joshua 6:20 after the Israelites complete God's commands for seven days:

*Joshua 6:20 (NKJV) So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.*

*Joshua 6:21 (NKJV) And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.*

*Joshua 6:25 (NKJV) And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.*

*Joshua 6:27 (NKJV) So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.*

I would like to take a few moments to address a difficult and challenging issue we see in verse 21:

*Joshua 6:21 (NKJV) And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.* We will see this term "utterly destroy/totally destroy" come up a number of times in the Old Testament. This is extremely challenging and troubling to modern readers...it's challenging for me, too! The term refers to the giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them. Why did God command the Israelites to "utterly destroy" all the people in Jericho...man, woman, young & old? The main reasons are given earlier in the Biblical account: We see that there is a story going on here between God & the Canaanites. In Genesis 15, God is speaking to Abraham and He tells him that Abraham's descendants will inherit the land of Canaan. *Genesis 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites [Canaanite people group] is not yet complete.* Their sin has not yet reached its full measure. God was being PATIENT with the Canaanite people group. *Deuteronomy 9:5 (Moses speaking to Israel) It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* The culture of the Canaanites had become extremely corrupt, especially in areas of child sacrifice & sexual immorality (see Deut 12 & Lev. 18). The Conquest of Canaan has two purposes: 1. God is going to bless Israel and fulfill His promise 2. God is going to deal with the sin & wickedness of the Canaanites. This is not an "ISRAEL vs. CANAAN conflict" based on ethnic identity; it is about GOD judging HUMAN EVIL. It isn't that God arbitrarily hates these people; God hates their practices. By total destruction, it would also protect the Israelites from falling into the same idolatrous & evil practices. Israel is merely God's "agent/rod" which He uses to bring His judgment on the wickedness of Canaan. God is consistent and doesn't play favorites. He warned the Israelites that if they broke the covenant and engaged in idolatry and wickedness, THEY TOO would face the same punishment for their repeated rebellion. That's precisely what happens to Israel later in the Bible: God uses Babylon as His agent/rod of judgment toward Israel, and they are carried off into Babylonian exile.

Although the Canaanites were subject to God's judgment, they had decades of advance warning (remember what happened to Pharaoh). They were not caught by surprise and those who declared faith in the Lord were spared! Remember Rahab & her family? In Joshua 9, we see that the Gibeonites surrendered, made peace with Israel, and were also spared.

Lastly, these battles were a Unique Moment in Israel's History. The commands for Israel to "totally destroy" was specific in time, purpose, and geography. Israel was NOT given free-reign to do the same to anyone they encountered. With all other nations, Israel was commanded by God to pursue peace (see Deut. 20:10) This account with Jericho was NEVER to tell YOU to go commit violence in God's Name!

Let me wrap up with a powerful phrase from Joshua 6:20. Joshua and the Israelites: TRUST God...they OBEY what God says...they WAIT upon God. They participate in His strange strategy. They shout at the top of their lungs, just as the Lord commanded them. And we read simply yet powerfully in v.20 that... "the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. The battle of Jericho does NOT DISPLAY the strength & might of Joshua. It displays the Strength of Almighty God. And how Israel prospers when they Trust, Obey & Wait upon the Lord no matter HOW STRANGE GOD'S STRATEGY IS!!!

I encountered an example of a strange strategy in a book called "God's Smuggler" by a man known as Brother Andrew. In the height of the Cold War, Brother Andrew would smuggle Bibles behind the "Iron Curtain"...into the countries in Eastern Europe which were, at the time, hostile to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When smuggling these Bibles across the borders, he wrestled with whether or not he should LIE or tell the truth to the police. He would say what he calls the "Prayer of God's Smuggler" - "Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture that I want to take to Your children across this border. When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let those guards see those things You do not want them to see." He tells the story of bringing Bibles across the Romanian border. "It took forty minutes to inspect one of the cars in front of me. Everything that family was carrying had to be taken out and spread on the ground. The next inspection lasted well over an hour. The guards took the driver inside...they removed hub caps, took his engine apart, removed seats.

"Dear Lord," I said, as there was just 1 car ahead of me, "what am I going to do? Any serious inspection will reveal these Romanian Bibles right away. "Lord," I went on, "I know that no amount of cleverness on my part can get me through this border search. Dare I ask for a miracle? Let me take some of the Bibles out and leave them in the open where they will be seen. Then, Lord I cannot possibly be depending on my own strategy, can I? I will be depending utterly upon You." I managed to take several Bibles from their hiding places and pile them on the seat beside me. (IN FULL VIEW) "It was my turn. I put the little VW in low gear, inched up to the officer standing at the left side of the road, handed him my papers, and started to get out. But his knee was against the door, holding it closed. He looked at my photograph in the passport, scribbled something down, shoved the papers back under my nose, and abruptly waved me on. "30 seconds had not passed. I started the engine and inched forward. "My heart was racing. Not with the excitement of the crossing, but with the excitement of having caught such a spectacular glimpse of God at work!"

God had a strange strategy for Brother Andrew. Brother Andrew knew that Victory comes as we Trust, Obey, and Wait upon the Lord. Listen: Walls are No Match for God. We sometimes use the word "wall" to represent a barrier, block, obstacle. "I'm hitting a wall; I'm banging my head against a wall; I can't seem to push through this wall" Whatever wall, or barrier, you are facing today, Walls are No Match for God. The Walls of Jericho were no match for God. Brother Andrew's "wall" of the Iron Curtain was no match for God. And whatever wall YOU are facing...no matter how tall, how thick, how menacing and ominous it may appear...it is NO MATCH FOR GOD. It is not based on how strong or able or clever YOU are. It's not up to you to HUFF, & PUFF, & BLOW that wall down. As we learned in Joshua today, God has the strength and ability to bring down walls and MAKE LEVEL PATHS FOR YOUR FEET for wherever He is leading you....and we will walk in victory (like Joshua) as we trust God, obey His Word, and wait upon Him.

*Psalm 33:16-20 (NKJV) No king is saved by the multitude of an army; A mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, On those who hope in His mercy, To deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine.*

*Our soul waits for the Lord;  
He is our help and our shield.*