

Joshua Facing the Challenge

by Warren Wiersbe

Warren Wiersbe's sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's presence and authority in leadership, as exemplified by Joshua's experiences before the conquest of Jericho.

Duration: 38:41

Scripture: Joshua 2:8-11, Psalm 149:6, Matthew 1:23, Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Joshua and his encounter with a man with a drawn sword near Jericho. Joshua asks if the man is for or against them, and the man reveals himself as the captain of the Lord's host. Joshua falls on his face and worships the man, recognizing the holiness of the place. The speaker emphasizes four discoveries that Joshua made: he was not alone, he was second in command, he was on holy ground, and he had already won the battle. The sermon concludes with the assurance that God has given Joshua the victory over Jericho.

Transcript

Frank Boggs and I have been together in many different conferences, and the same thing always happens. I can't explain it except the leadership of the Holy Spirit. I don't recall I have ever told Frank what I'm preaching about, but somehow the song that he selects, I would have selected.

Turn to Joshua, chapter 5. Now, this happened day after day down at the back of Ben Haden's church, where we were together in the Bible conference, missionary conference. And that's what music is all about, you know. Music is not separate from the Word.

Music is singing the Word and preaching the Word. They go together. That's why it's always such a delight to be with Frank Boggs.

We're talking about the crises of life. And we've looked at some people who have experienced personal crisis experiences. And we have Joshua, in Joshua 5, verse 13.

And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went unto him and said unto him, Art thou for us or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship and said unto him, What saith my Lord

unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place where I now standest is holy.

And Joshua did so. I don't know if this event took place in the daytime or in the evening. I have a suspicion that it may have been in the evening when the general was out surveying the situation.

I don't know if this tells you much about my personality. I suppose a psychiatrist could build a case out of it. But I like the evening.

I'm a morning person. I'm up early in the morning and at my desk. But I enjoy the twilight time.

I like that time when the day is quieting down and the evening has not yet gotten started. The phone isn't ringing, visitors aren't arriving. And there's that little parenthesis there.

And I don't know what you do during that parenthesis, but I sort of like to take a few minutes and just sit and think and meditate and pray. And I think that Joshua was out looking the situation over, getting ready for the conquest of the land. Now, can you imagine how Joshua must have felt? I don't know.

We who preach the word of God try to enter imaginatively into the situations where it's sometimes wrong. You see, Joshua was facing quite a crisis here, quite a challenge here, because, number one, he was following a very great leader, Moses. Moses, my servant, is dead.

Now arrive and conquer the land. It's not easy to walk in big footsteps. I've been getting mail from people since Mr. Eck was called home, and they say, oh, we're so glad you were there to take his place.

And I write back to them, dear friend, thank you for your help and encouragement. I am not going to take Mr. Eck's place. Nobody could take Mr. Eck's place.

We are going to do our best to continue the ministry God gave him. We're all different. I suppose there were some in Israel who were saying, well, this is not Moses, this is Joshua.

He was following a great leader, and he was facing a new generation. You see, Joshua had grown up with the old generation. He and Caleb were the only two allowed to survive.

But here was a whole new generation of people, a new generation with a new leader facing a new challenge, and that is not easy. I'm sure that Joshua had human feelings like all of us do. What if? What if? I know he was a man of faith, but sometimes faith and feelings can conflict.

I know Joshua was a great man of faith, but he was also a human being. And here he is the evening before the conquest is to start, and he has this crisis experience of meeting our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, Joshua knew that his biggest problem was not the past, trying to look up to Moses' achievements.

His biggest problem was not before him conquering the land. God had given him promise about that. Joshua's biggest problem wasn't behind him or before him.

It was within him. And by the way, when we are defeated on the outside, we win the battle before the win. And God wanted to make sure that before this battle began, victories are won in Christ.

You may not realize that, but it's true. The most important part of your life is the part only God sees. The people didn't see this event take place.

There weren't spectators walking around saying, Look at that, look, Joshua is talking to somebody special. What's this all about? No, no, no. Just as it was with Jacob.

And Jacob was left. And that wrestling is what determined the course of his public life afterward. Nobody saw David killed.

And you're liable to think to yourself, Well, it's really important when I'm standing in a pulpit or when I'm seated at an instrument. It's really important when I'm in a classroom. They are important places.

But the most important part of your life is the part only God sees. When you and God meet alone, and God gives you victory. Joshua made four very encouraging discoveries when he went through this crisis experience.

And I think if you and I would lay hold of these same discoveries, it might help us when we face some crisis experience. There's a Christian worker here during this conference, and you're so glad to be here because you're away from the battlefield. Or you've had a rough time.

There are problems to solve, and there are people to help. And when you packed up and came to this conference, it was as though God said, Now look, you have to come home again. You can't run away.

Can't do like Jonah. But when you come back, you're going to be better equipped to face your Jericho. And if you lay hold of these four discoveries that Joshua made, you can face your Jericho.

Discovery number one, Joshua discovered he wasn't alone. You say he had several million Jews working with him, fighting with him. No, no, I'm not talking about that.

Have you ever considered the loneliness of leadership? When I was a young Christian, we used to go to Winona Lake, Indiana for the Bible conference there and the Youth for Christ week and the other week. So I'd turn the radio on, listen to WNBI broadcasting. Or we'd turn on Founders Week or come to Founders Week.

And I'd sit there as a young Christian, and I'd look at those spiritual leaders. I'd say to myself, Oh, those people have got it made. They really have it made.

Now I'm beginning to understand some of the loneliness of leadership. A leader has to make decisions that have far-reaching consequences. If I were on my own, just doing my own thing, going where I want to go and preaching where I want to preach, it would be a relatively simple thing.

But every decision I make involves other people. And it has far-reaching results. I think of a man like Dr. Swiggin with the outreach of the Moody Bible Institute.

When you think of a man like Luis Palau and the evangelistic outreach. The loneliness of leadership. You say that you're surrounded by people and there are people praying for you.

That's right. And you have counsel. This is good.

We thank God for that. But as the late Harry Truman, our President, had on his desk, The buck stops here. Mr. Truman used to say, If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

And sometimes leaders can't stand the heat. The loneliness of leadership. And here's Joshua looking at his army and saying, These people have put their lives in my hands.

Here are families, here are children. Joshua is the man who is going to give them a place to live, water to drink, food to eat. There is Joshua with the future of a nation in his hands.

But that's not all. That's not all. One day a Savior would be born in Bethlehem.

Somebody has to capture Bethlehem. One day a Savior would minister in the Holy Land. Somebody has to prepare the Holy Land.

Here is Joshua helping God fulfill his plan of redemption. That is a big undertaking. The loneliness of leadership.

I mentioned Mr. Truman. Let me give you a quotation. He said, To be President of the United States is to be lonely, very lonely at times of great decisions.

Woodrow Wilson said this, It is an awful thing to be President of the United States. It means giving up nearly everything that one holds dear. One day when he was going through a deep period of depression, Abraham Lincoln said, He was not yet President when he said this, I am now the most miserable man living.

If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on. The loneliness of leadership, and yet Joshua discovered he wasn't alone. He knew he would not be alone, because back in chapter 1 God had promised to be with him.

Let's look at that. Joshua chapter 1. Now, after the death of Moses, everything fell apart and came to a halt. That's the way some of you think.

Oh, if ever we had a different pastor, that would be the end of our church. No, it wouldn't. Jesus said, I will build my church.

Wasn't it John Wesley who said, God buries his workmen and carries on his work. If the Lord doesn't return, the day will come when it will read, After the death of Wiersbe. What does God do? He finds somebody else to keep his work going.

The servant of the Lord. It came to pass that the Lord spoke unto Joshua. God didn't stop talking when Moses died.

The son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel, every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said to Moses, to step out by faith. Now, verse 5. There shall not be any man able to stand before thee all the days of thy life, so I will be with thee.

Now, he repeats this, but he repeated this in case he didn't get it the first and second time. The third time in verse 7. And the Lord said unto Joshua, we're supposed to magnify Jesus Christ. But God magnified Joshua.

He took this leader and gave him promise. It doesn't really end. Joshua said, this day will I begin.

God did it. This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel. Know what? That as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

God promised Joshua that he would be with him. Not only that, the people of Israel encouraged Joshua this way. In chapter 1 and verse 17, they said, according as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee.

Only the Lord thy God be with thee as he was with Moses. Pastors come and go. God leads men in different places.

A new pastor comes in. A church member says, well, you aren't my former pastor. You know, he baptized me.

Well, praise the Lord. Oh, if they would just say, look, as the Lord was with our former pastor, as the Lord was with our former president, as the Lord was with our former director, so may we be with you. In fact, the enemy even knew that God was with Joshua.

In chapter 2, verses 8 through 11, Rahab tells them and says, look, we know that God's with you. We heard what happened to the Red Sea and we heard the terror that has come to the nations as you've been marching along. The enemy knew that God was with Joshua.

But now Joshua experiences this in a very personal way. You see, it's one thing for me to read my Bible that God is with me, and it's quite something else to experience it. You say, well, I don't think God is with me the way he was with Joshua.

I think he is. I read in Hebrews 13, verse 5, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. The gospel of Matthew begins, call his name Immanuel, God with us.

That's the way it begins. The gospel of Matthew ends, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. And so between Immanuel, God with us, and lo, I am with you, we have the assurance that in every circumstance of life the Lord is with us.

He discovered he was not alone. The devil wants you to feel alone. In fact, when you're going through a crisis experience, one of the worst things you can do is to isolate yourself from God's people.

That's what Elijah did. Someday I want to write a little booklet on the Elijah complex. Elijah won a great victory on Mount Carmel.

What a victory! He was mounding up with wings like an eagle. Great victory! But you know, so often after a great victory there is an emotional and a physical drop. I noticed when I was in the pastoral ministry that when we had a special meeting or we had a special event of some kind, I had to be very careful afterwards because physically and emotionally and sometimes spiritually, you were just drained.

That's when the devil moves in. And Elijah got discouraged. He went off by himself.

He should never do that. And there he is, off by himself, forgiving that God is with him. I'm the only one left.

That's the Elijah complex. I'm the only one in our church who's spiritual. I'm the only one in our church who tithes.

How do you know? I'm the only one in this city who really is separated. Really. I only am left.

And I want to die. Watch out for that. You're not alone.

When the devil comes to you and says, Hey, you're all alone. Your friends don't care about you. Pastors don't care about you.

Alumni Association hasn't written to you for some weeks. God doesn't care about you. You're all alone.

That's when you are the target for every kind of assault. Discovery number one, he discovered he was not alone. Someday when you get discouraged, you think you're the only one left and you're all alone.

Read the life of another great man who conquered cities. Now, Joshua conquered cities in judgment. The Apostle Paul conquered cities in redemption.

Joshua came and declared war, but Paul would show up at a city and declare peace. He reconciled to God. He got to Corinth, and it was so discouraging.

And God showed up in Corinth one night and said, Paul, don't be afraid. I am with you. Paul went to Jerusalem.

They arrested him. He's there in the jail. And that night, God came to him and said, Don't be afraid, Paul.

I am with you. You've witnessed in Jerusalem. Now you're going to witness in Rome.

They're on board ship. A storm comes. They're afraid they're going to lose everything.

God shows up and says, Paul, don't be afraid. I'm going to give you everybody on board ship, but we've got to wreck the ship. So Paul gets up and says, Be of good cheer.

I sure love a person like that. The rain is coming down. The wind is blowing.

People are sick and hungry. Paul gets up and says, Be of good cheer. The Lord whom I serve sent his angel, and he said, Don't be afraid.

I'm with you. Paul gets down to Rome, and he writes to Timothy and said, At my first hearing, everybody forsook me. Isn't that interesting? People that Paul had won to Christ did not stand with him when he was on trial.

But he said, The Lord stood with me, and he's going to deliver me. As you go through the life of Paul, you find no matter where he was, no matter what he did, God was with him. Discovery number two.

He discovered that he was second in command. That must have been somewhat of a revolving development. Second in command.

I like Joshua's attitude. He sees this soldier standing there with a sword. It's the Lord Jesus.

He always comes to us in the way we need him. The Lord Jesus didn't come to Joshua as a pilgrim, as a fisherman, as a carpenter. He came as a soldier.

That's what Joshua needed. Joshua sees this soldier, and he's not at all afraid. Courageously, he steps up and says, Whose side are you on? The Lord's side, or whose side are you on? I like a person like that.

You're either in or out. You're not on a fence. You're either with the Lord Jesus or against the Lord Jesus.

You're either gathering or you're scattering. Now, I know there are some issues in life that maybe are various shades of gray, but when it comes to allegiance, you're either loyal or disloyal. There was no place in Joshua's campaign for neutrality, and there's no place today in our campaign for neutrality.

Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King? And the soldier answered, You've asked me whose side I'm on. I want to tell you whose side I'm on. I'm the boss of the whole thing.

I am. And Joshua, you're the captain of this earthly host, and I'm the captain of the heavenly host and the earthly host, and I'm going to deputize you to run this army down here. But remember, you're second in command.

It's a great day in the life of a person when he discovers he's second in command, that we're not first in command. Now, Joshua had everything going for him. If I were going to choose a leader to conquer the land, I would have chosen Joshua.

Born in Egyptian slavery, he knew the meaning of suffering. He'd seen the miracles in Egypt. He'd crossed the Red Sea.

He had walked by faith for 40 years. He'd seen a whole generation of doubters die. Here is Joshua, experienced, Moses' minister.

Got to start carrying Moses' attache case for him. Then he got promoted and became the captain of the army. Then he'd go up on the mountaintop or into the tabernacle with Moses.

Oh, he learned so much about God. Joshua had everything going for him. He had faith and patience and experience.

But you know what? All of that would have been useless had he not done what he did that night. He fell before the Lord Jesus and said, All right, I'm second in command. Every father is second in command.

Every mother is second in command. Every pastor is second in command. Every Christian leader is second in command.

The Lord Jesus Christ says, As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship and said unto him, What saith my Lord to his servant? What a statement. What saith, that's God's word, my Lord, that's God's will, to his servant, that's God's work and warfare.

He was second in command. You know, it's a great tragedy that takes place when a person thinks he's first in command. They did fight the battle of Jericho, as you know, they did win.

But the next battle they fought, Joshua was in command. And the spies came and said, You know, Ai is not a very big place, it's just a little bump in the road. The place is so small, Howard Johnson only has one flavor.

The zip code is a fraction. It's just a little place. And let's just send a few people down there to wipe them out.

Joshua got first in command, and oh my, they lost the battle. Then he found out he'd better be second in command. I've learned this in my own ministry.

Oh, I've got the scars to prove it. That whenever I take over and I run something, it'll run, but it won't run right. George MacDonald used to say, Whatever man does without God, he must either fail miserably or succeed more miserably.

And that's frightening. He discovered he was second in command, fell down at the feet of the Lord Jesus. And the first command that Jesus gave to him was, Take off your shoes.

What a thing to say to a general. You know, I would have said, All right, I'm first in command. Go over there and stab that tree.

Show me you can use your sword. Do some great thing. No, he just said, Take off your shoes.

Our Lord said, He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is greatest. If I can't trust you to bring back ten cents change when I send you the store, I can't trust you with a million dollars. If you aren't faithful with the few sheep that God's given to you, God won't give you more.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou has been faithful over a few things. I will make thee rule over many things.

Enter thou into the joy of the Lord. God watched David and discovered David was faithful taking care of a few sheep and fighting a lion and a bear, so he let him beat a giant and gave him a whole nation. Faithfulness in little things, everyday things like taking off your shoes.

He discovered that he was not alone. He discovered that he was second in command. There was a third discovery he made.

He discovered he was on holy ground. Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy. I wouldn't have thought that.

I mean, this is Canaan land. God described Canaan land and the people in it, and it was a filthy place, a godless place, immoral, idolatrous, ignorant. For hundreds of years, God patiently had held back his judgment on this crowd.

All these ites, the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. God had seen all of this filth and vomit and sewage. And now Israel crosses the river.

Israel comes into the land. And God says, you're standing on holy ground. He discovered that he was on holy ground.

Do you know what that means? Wherever God calls you is holy ground, no matter what you may see. You see, Joshua had stood on many kinds of ground. He'd been in Egypt, which certainly wasn't holy ground.

He'd walked across the sea on dry ground. He'd been up in the mountain to see the glory of God. He'd been in the tabernacle with Moses.

But you know, wherever God puts you is holy ground. Watch this. There is no such thing as secular and sacred in Christian living.

Everything is holy ground if God is there. You walk into a hospital room where people are complaining and swearing and maybe reading salacious literature, but there's somebody you want to visit there. When you walk in as God's ambassador, that's holy ground.

That means wherever we go to fight God's battles, we better go in a spirit of worship. Did you ever notice in your Bible that worship and warfare... I'll have more to say about this this afternoon when we talk about worship. You cannot isolate worship from warfare.

Let me give you a verse to ponder. It's a verse that we don't often think about. Psalm 149, verse 6. Psalm 149, verse 6, which says, "...let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand." That's a great verse.

And the rest of the psalm says to execute vengeance upon the enemy. Now, wait a minute. The first half of the verse, worship.

Let the high praises of God be in their mouth. The last half of the verse, warfare. "...and a two-edged sword in their hand to bring vengeance." Do you know why we are failing before the enemy in our warfare? It's because we're failing before God in our worship.

We're using all kinds of weapons to try to defeat the enemy. The greatest weapon we have is worship. Joshua learned that very early in his life.

Here is Israel delivered from Egypt. And lo and behold, the Amalekites show up, those pests who were bothering everybody. The Amalekites show up, and Joshua comes and says, Moses, the Amalekites are going to attack us.

Moses says, take your army, take your sword, go out there and fight them. I'm going up on top of the mountain. And so Moses went up there on top of the mountain, and he lifted up his hands in worship and prayer.

His hands got heavy, and Aaron and Hur held his hands up. And if you had been watching the scene from a distance, you would have thought, you know, strange things going on. There's an old man over here on the mountain.

Whenever he raises his hand, Israel wins. Whenever he drops his hands, Israel loses. There must be some connection between that fellow on the mountain and this battle going on.

Here's Joshua down there fighting. Here's Moses up here worshiping and praying. And as Moses worships and prays, Joshua has victory.

Moses alone could not have won the battle simply praying. Joshua alone could not have won the battle simply fighting. But when you have the high praises of God in your mouth and a two-edged sword in your hand, you get victory.

We don't do that today. If somebody in government does something we don't like, we start a battle, but we forget about the worship. He discovered he was on holy ground.

And I tell you, when you and I discover how to fall at the feet of Jesus and worship Him, the battle is going to be a lot easier, which leads us to our fourth discovery. He discovered he was not alone, and he discovered he was second in command, and he discovered he was on holy ground, and he discovered

that he already won the battle. If you see, chapter 6 continues, Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel.

None went out, none came in. And the Lord said to Joshua, See, I have given into thy hand Jericho, and its king, and the mighty men of valor, and ye shall compass all the city, and then he goes on and gives that intricate plan for conquering Jericho. Notice those statements.

I have, you shall. I have, you shall. I have already given you the victory.

Oh, it was a great day in my own life when I heard some preacher say, and I wish I could remember who it was, We don't fight for victory, we fight from victory. Be of good cheer, said Jesus. He's on his way to the cross now.

He just told Peter you're going to deny me. He just told him there's a traitor in the crowd. You're all going to forsake me and flee away.

And he says, In the world you're going to have tribulation. That's good news. For some of the saints, you'd think he would have said, In the world you shall have a vacation.

No. In the world you shall have tribulation. Be of good cheer.

I have overcome the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. And faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

And so that's why Joshua said, What do you have to say to me? You speak the word, I'll hear it by faith, and faith will release power. And the Lord Jesus said, Here's the plan. You see, Joshua discovered he had already won the battle.

He had the assurance of victory, and he had the agenda for victory. The Lord Jesus said, We've already given you the city, now here's the way you're going to do it. Hudson Taylor used to say that there are three ways to serve the Lord.

One is to do what you want to do and hope it will work out. The other is to do what you want to do and ask God to bless it. The third is to find out what God wants to do and then expect him to bless it.

That's what Joshua did. If Joshua had been like Peter, he would have said, Lord, it's good to see you here. I want to tell you, here's my battle plan.

And Peter would have unrolled all of his maps, but not Joshua. Soldiers know how to take orders. Did you know that Mr. Moody did not like for Mr. Sankey to use onward Christian soldiers in their campaign? And the reason was, he said, I can't think of any group of people less like an army than the Church of Jesus Christ.

This is true. Do you see army discipline in a local church? No, we go if we feel good. Can you imagine roll call in the army? Jones here, Johnson here, Smith.

Smith couldn't come today, he had a headache. Oh, I hope he gets to feeling better. Williams, Williams decided to play golf today.

Oh, I hope he has a good game. Halford Lukak wrote that in one of his columns years ago, like a mighty army. He's right.

We're not like an army in discipline or devotion or duty. Why, if we were an army and God treated us like the military treats their people, we'd all be in the guardhouse. So Joshua knew how to take orders and he discovered he had already won the battle.

These are some great discoveries. I need these. As I go back to Lincoln, Nebraska and face my Jerichos, as the Moody Bible Institute looks forward to century two, facing their Jerichos, as you raise your children or minister in your church with your Jerichos, just remember, you're not alone.

Just remember, you're second in command. Just remember that you are on holy ground. Don't forget to worship.

And best of all, remember, you've already won the battle when you obey by faith. Our prayer, Father, is that we shall indeed war by faith and win the victory of faith to the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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