

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. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

¹⁴ **“Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”**

¹⁵ **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.**

^{6:1} **Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.**

² **Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”**

²⁰ **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. (NIV84)**

Theme: The Lord gives us the improbable victory.

The two boys came up with a plan. They would build a ramp from the top of the roof down to the ground that would then rise suddenly for a few feet. The idea is that they would take ride a bike down the ramp safely backyard pool. So they get to work, building the ramp with whatever scrap wood they can find. The older brother graciously allowed the younger to go first. But as he gets on his bike; 35 feet in the air, looking down at the rickety ramp, he got cold feet. “I don’t think I can do this,” he says to his brother. “Trust me, it’s going to work.” So with his fears calmed and his nerves stilled, he heads on

down the ramp despite how ridiculous the whole situation seemed and the improbability that it would work.

The wait for the children of Israel was finally over. After 400 years in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness, they had finally returned to the Promised Land. The Lord had been with the Israelites during the entire time. Even though they were slaves in Egypt, God blessed them to such a great extent that they had become a nation of millions of people. Through the 10 plagues including the Passover the Lord freed his people from slavery but when the Egyptian army pursued them he caused the waters of the Red Sea to part and they passed through on dry ground; and when the Egyptian army tried to follow them the walls of water crashed on top of them. 40 years later, as the Israelites were to enter the Promised Land, he caused the waters of the Jordan River to stop up and once again they passed through on dry ground. For the first time in over 400 years God’s people were in Canaan—they had returned to the Promised Land, the land God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And now that they were home, it was time to conquer the land and drive out and destroy any and all inhabitants. They were going to go against the large and fortified city of Jericho. The entire city was closed up tightly in fear of the Jews. So the Lord told Joshua exactly what to do—the people were to march around the city once for six days. And then on the seventh day they were to march around seven times and after the seventh time the priests were to blow on the rams’ horns and when the people heard the sound of the horns they were to shout. And when they did this, the Lord promised that walls of the city would come crashing down.

Sounds like a ridiculous plan, doesn’t it? What laws of physics would that follow? There is no scientific reason that the sound of horns and the shouts of people would cause thick walls of brick or stone to come crumbling to the ground! It just doesn’t make any sense. It would almost be embarrassing to do something like that—simply march around the city! If it didn’t work they would look like shouting idiots! Why don’t they just attack and overwhelm the city? Sure, they would lose some men, but they would most certainly win the victory.

What battles do you face in life? What seemingly insurmountable odds do you have to go up against on a daily basis? For some, it might

be financial issues. Your job doesn't pay as much as you would like, you've had a number of unexpected expenses lately, and you struggle to make ends meet. Perhaps you've racked up a lot of debt, and you're not sure how you'll be able to pay all the bills. Maybe the battles you face are with your family. There was a falling out between you and someone you love; and you're not sure how you'll ever be able to repair the relationship. You never intended things to be this way, and you fear that your life has now been changed forever. Maybe you are battling your health. You've always been healthy; but now you're faced with health problems and it is becoming harder to accomplish simple everyday tasks, and it's hard to enjoy life when you are constantly in pain.

We all face battles in this life, and at times it may seem as if the odds are insurmountable. But the biggest battles we face are the battles against sin. We are born with the innate desire to do what is evil. We are selfish by nature, thinking about only what is good and beneficial for us. We often only do things for others after we have decided that it might benefit us somehow somewhere down the line. We also don't like being told what to do. We want to do what pleases us and makes us happy and we become upset at anyone who tries to tell us that it is wrong. We face this battle against our sinful nature time and time again. And time and time again we lose, as Paul says in Romans 7, **I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.** The battle we face is against our sinful nature is a battle that we cannot win. And we know that the wages of sins is death and eternal damnation.

Before Joshua and the Israelites faced the fortified city of Jericho, he noticed a man whom he did not recognize, with a sword in his hand. He went over to the man and asked if he was for the Israelites or their enemies. But this was no ordinary man. This was the commander of the Lord's army. Since Joshua was the commander of the Israelites army, this "man" was the commander of God's heavenly army! Immediately Joshua fell on his knees with his face to the ground and bowed down before him, as if he were to worship him. The commander said, **Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.** These words are almost identical to what the Lord

said to Moses when he called him out of the burning bush. After a parenthetical sentence about the state of Jericho at the time, the Lord speaks to Joshua. This leader of the Lord's army, wasn't simply a man, or an angel; this was most likely the Lord himself—the preexistent son of God!

And he was with the Israelites. Don't be deceived by the NIV's translation here. When Joshua asked if he was for the Israelites or their enemies the NIV has him responding with, **Neither.** But he really only says, **No**, most likely in answer to his second question—if he was for their enemies. This wasn't a man that had to choose a side to fight with; this was God who did as he pleased since he is independent of man!

As Joshua understood who this really was, it became apparent to him that the Lord was leading this battle and it was up to them to obey him. And that is what they did! As ridiculous as the plan sounded, they did it. They marched around the city once for six days; and then seven times on the seventh day. And after that seventh time the priests blew the horns and the people shouted and the walls came crashing down. The people ran into the city and destroyed it and killed its inhabitants. And it was abundantly clear to the Israelites that this victory didn't come about by their own power. This wasn't their victory, this was God's victory. There was no scientific explanation for the walls crumbling to the ground. They didn't do that, God did it—the Lord gets all the credit. The Lord said as much to Joshua in verse 2, **See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.**

We face that insurmountable enemy of our sinful nature, and along with him death and the power of the devil. It is an enemy that we cannot defeat. But as the Lord was with the Israelites, so he is also with us. As he fought for them, he also fought for us. That is why he came to this earth. It wasn't to get a close-up look at his creation, or to see what it was like to live as a human. No, he came for one reason and one reason only—to save us. As Paul wrote his friend Timothy, **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.** Christ came to fight a battle that we couldn't win. And he won that victory for us. By living a perfect life, which he credited to us; by taking our sins upon himself and suffering the

eternal punishment that our sins deserve, he took away our sins and so removed the sting of death. By his resurrection from the dead he proved his power over death. Instead of something to be feared, he turned it into something we look forward to—for the earthly death of believers leads us to a new and eternal life with him forever. And when he rose from the dead he crushed Satan's head and defeated our enemies once and for all. It is this victory over death that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 15, **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

And as the Lord gave the victory over Jericho, he gives this victory to us. All the Israelites did was march around a city, blow some horns and shout—they did nothing to win the battle. When it comes to our salvation, we have done even less. Not one thing have we done to earn our eternal life—and there is not one thing we can do, for it has all been done already for us by Christ. It is a gift of grace. And it is received only through faith in him, which is also a gift of the Holy Spirit, which he has worked in us through the gospel.

With God on our side, we know that our enemies do not stand a chance. If God has given us his son, and if that son has given up his life to save us, then God will certainly give us all things. He will be with us throughout our lives, he will guard us and protect us. And we know that no matter what we face in this life, soon the Lord will take us to heaven, where we will enjoy such a perfect and glorious life that we'll forget all about the hardships we faced while on this earth.

And so, as the Israelites had faith in the Lord to fulfill his promises and give them the victory of their enemies, so we too believe that God will fulfill his promises and give us the victory over our enemies.

Faith in God trusts in him to do for us what is impossible.

And if we believe that he won for us this victory and gives this victory to us, then we also trust in him in all things. He knows the battles we face may be insurmountable to us, but they aren't to God. He is aware of our financial woes, family strife, health problems, and everything else going on in our lives. As he was with the Israelites and as he won the victory for us over our spiritual enemies, he is also with us in every aspect of our lives and will take care of us in all things.

The older brother tells us younger brother, "Trust me, it will work."

But it is a ridiculous plan that probably won't work. The plan to

defeat Jericho may have seemed like that; but it wasn't because the Lord gave them that victory. The same can be said about our salvation. So no matter what situations we face in our lives, no matter how seemingly insurmountable the odds we face, we have faith that the Lord keeps and his Word to us. And as the Israelites were not afraid or embarrassed to follow the Lord's command, no matter how ridiculous they may have seemed, so we too have no problem obeying God's Word and expressing our faith in him, because we know he keeps his promises and wins for us the improbable victory! Amen.