

Sunday Sermon: June 23, 2019

Sermon Text: Joshua 5:13–6:5, 20

Sermon Theme: God Does it His Own Way. We Trust in Him.

<sup>13</sup> 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?”

<sup>14</sup> “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?”

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

<sup>17</sup> Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. <sup>18</sup> March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.”

<sup>21</sup> 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.

You have probably heard the phrase, God works in mysterious ways. It might be interesting to know that that phrase does not appear anyway in the Bible. It is, however, a quote from a popular 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn.. The writer of the hymn, William Cowper, summarized many of the marvels and amazing things he saw God do in the Bible through the hymn he wrote, God Moves in a Mysterious Way. He used Romans 11: 33-36 as the Scriptural basis for that hymn that begins with the lines that we have all heard. **Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!** <sup>34</sup>“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” <sup>35</sup> “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” <sup>36</sup> **For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.**

God does move in mysterious ways. Often what God does and why he does it are far beyond our human ability to understand and comprehend. At these times, when God does things in a way that is different from our own, he doesn’t ask us to understand why he does what he does. He simply asks us to trust in him and his amazing love for us and to follow him.

Moses had led Israel faithfully for over 40 years. He had died and now Joshua had been named the leader of the children of Israel. God had given him the task of leading the people into the Promised Land. Following the Lord’s command, the people had crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, a sign that the Lord was with them. They had built an altar at that crossing point to show that they were following the Lord. They had rededicated themselves to the Lord through circumcision and the eating of the Passover at Gilgal. Now, they came to their first real obstacle: the city of Jericho.

This was not a mud-hut village that could be taken lightly. This was a city with walls, gates and fortifications. Joshua, the leader and commander, goes off alone to survey the scene before him. While he is alone a man appears. He is obviously some kind of soldier because he has a sword in his hand.

The man identifies himself as the commander of the Lord’s army. Joshua falls facedown and asks for the Lord’s message. What he expects to hear from this man, we do not know. Maybe he expected some battle plans, maybe a promise of victory, maybe something else. What he received in this message from the Lord was probably not what he was expecting.

The commander of the Lord tells Joshua the Israelites are to march around the city quietly for 6 days and on the 7<sup>th</sup> they were to call out, blow the horn and the city would be given to them by the LORD.

Imagine you are Joshua. You have seen the amazing way that God works miraculously and mysteriously in his own way. You have seen the Red Sea parted, the arms of Moses being held up for victory, the manna and quail, the water from the rocks, the bronze serpent, the pillars of fire and cloud. You have seen the

LORD do things that are unique and different that show that he is God, but this plan to destroy Jericho? Don't fight, just walk around the city, and I will give it to you....even that is unique for God.

Imagine you are the Israelites as Joshua is telling you what the plan is. What do you think about the plan? You don't need to be a military man to know that is not a good plan for taking the city. If you were an Israelite who was ready for war, this might sound like a funny plan to you..... but since it is God that says you are to do it you trust and you do as you are told.

Imagine you are the people of Jericho. You have heard that this great nation of Israel has a God that is unlike any other. You have heard what this God and his people did coming out of Egypt. The threat of this large group of people has been on the radar for many years through other stories. Now they are camped close to your city and your home. The city has taken every precaution of provisions and security; locking itself up tight. You know the attack will come, just not when. But instead of a siege or battering rams, or sword and arrows, they march around your city quietly. The first and second day might have been a little strange, a little funny. This is how they are going to take the city, by marching quietly? By the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> day, that feeling would have probably changed to something else as you are waiting to see what will happen. By now everyone is waiting to see what will happen next.

Then, on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, things change. The whole company marches around 7 times. Now everyone is on high alert. What fear and dread must have filled them when the horns sounded and the shouts came and the hand of the LORD knocked the walls down.

Taking the city in this way was not a great military plan, but it accomplished exactly what God wanted it to accomplish. It would show the Israelites that they would not take Canaan because of their military might. It would show them that this land of Canaan, and everything in it, was a gift from the LORD. It would show them that with God on their side they could accomplish anything by his almighty power. It would show them he would bless them in the way and at the time that he knew was best.

Taking the city this way also accomplished another part of God's plan. This would be a message to all the other nations on Canaan that there was only one true God. All the idols and all of these unbelieving nations would fall before this God as easily as the walls of Jericho had been destroyed.

God didn't take the city of Jericho in a way that anyone would have expected. He didn't ask them to understand, he asked them to trust in his plan and to follow him and that's what they did.

How do we react when God asks us to trust in him and follow his way? There are many times in life where God does things his own way that may seem strange to us or are contrary to the way that we would do things. No one wants to have an illness, or a pain, or a disease, yet God allows them into our life for a reason. There are times that God directs our life in a path that is different than any path we might plan for ourselves. There are times when we truly think we know what we want and God simply does not give it to us. What do we do when God does it his way and asks us to trust?

So often, instead of following our God when he has a different plan than ours we do not answer with faith, we answer with distrust and unbelief. We get angry at God when his way is not our way. . We blame God when we have trouble. We get upset with him when life isn't as pleasant as we want it to be. We seek a path that is more to our liking when the path that God has laid out is not the one we want. Even when God speaks to us in his Word, we refuse to listen and seek a message that is what we want to hear.

In our first lesson, the Apostle Paul calls out to the Galatians because they were no longer faithfully following God's way. **<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.**

Many times we lament that other people are turning away from the truth of God's Word to something else. There are shallow Christians who think that all we need is Jesus' name on a necklace or T-shirt to be saved. There are confused Christians who think that all people will go to heaven regardless of what they believe. There are stubborn Christians who think that God has to let them into heaven. There are lazy Christians who say they believe, but don't ever hear or study the Word. There are unrepentant Christians who would rather hold on to their sins as part of their life and lifestyle then repent of those sins, change their life, and know the forgiveness of their Savior.

These are not just the sins of other people they are our own as well. Somewhere in these sins we can see ourselves. Maybe it's now, maybe it's some other time we have been a stubborn, confused, shallow, or lazy Christian because we have not trusted and followed God when he has directed us.

Whether we know it or not God's way is always the best. He shows us his love in miraculous and mysterious ways that are far beyond our understanding. Think about forgiveness and eternal life. Man has come up with so many ways that a person can be saved. While they look different they are really all the same: you need to do something to get your own salvation. You need to work hard, or buy it, or do enough for it.

But God's salvation is completely different. He does not follow man's rules or logic, he does things his own way. When you think about it, how we are saved is as ridiculous and miraculous as the victory God gave to Israel at Jericho. Through no effort of your own you are saved. You are saved only through the work of another. You are not saved because you are perfect. You are saved because Jesus was perfect for you. You are not saved because you paid for your sins, you are saved because Jesus paid for your sins.

Just as he did at Jericho, God gives us salvation in a way that we would never expect so that we know that our forgiveness and salvation are not of our own doing, they are not the work of our hands. They are completely through his love and to his glory.

By doing it his way God also calls out to the world with his full and free forgiveness and offers the same love to a world that is lost in sin and unbelief.

God may work in mysterious ways, but his way is always the best. He doesn't ask us to understand his way, he asks us to trust and follow him. May God build us up in faith so that we trust God in all things and simply follow where he leads.