

# Joshua 1-7

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning we began with the words that John Ross had posted on Facebook in this past week, and I'll remind you the words that he said, Now let's set that behind us and press on to win Scotland and the world for Jesus.

And we gave some thought this morning to this matter of winning Scotland for Jesus, and identified, with the help of the centurion who's described for us in Luke chapter 7, how love for our nation is a necessary resource for this task.

Now I want to, this evening, continue on this same theme of winning or taking possession of our nation for Jesus Christ, and this time with reference to the manner in which the people of God took possession of Jericho, which as we know was a key victory in the taking of the promised land.

And the account that we have read provides us with some important principles that we can draw and seek to apply to the task that we have been given of taking possession of this land, the land of Scotland, for our Lord.

And what we want to do is really a bird's eye view of what is presented for us, without delving into the details, though there would be much merit and profit in doing that, but we are not going to do so this evening.

[ 1 : 47 ] More of a bird's eye view. And as we have that bird's eye view, we want to identify two things. First of all, what is it that God does in this matter, in the taking, particularly, the conquest, the taking of Jericho?

What is God's role, or what does God do? But then also, what is it that the people are required to do? There are these two sides, if you wish, to the story, what God does and what the people do.

And as we identify some of the elements, I trust that we'll be able to draw lessons for ourselves. Today, concerning what God continues to do, and concerning what God continues to require us to do in this matter.

Now, as we do this, it will involve, particularly, considering the passage that relates the account of the fall of Jericho, but we'll also be noting some of the prior material, and particularly the two passages that we read in chapter 1 and 2 of Joshua.

First of all, then, we want to notice and identify what is it that God does in this venture, in this conquest of Jericho.

[ 3 : 17 ] What is it that God does? The first thing I want us to notice concerning what God does is that He commands that this promised land be occupied, and very particularly, that this city be taken.

God, first of all, or the first thing we identify, is that He commands. We've read in Joshua chapter 1, and we can remind ourselves of what we read there, particularly in the first two verses of Joshua chapter 1.

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them, to the Israelites.

Indeed, this whole chapter in the church Bible is given this title, The Lord Commands Joshua. Now, while we recognize that these titles are not part of the text of Scripture, nonetheless, on this occasion, it is a perfectly reasonable and helpful summary of what is going on here at the beginning of the book, The Lord Commands.

Perhaps the only thing we would say to slightly take issue with the manner the chapter is described, it says, The Lord Commands Joshua. But what we actually find is that the Lord doesn't just command Joshua, the Lord commands Joshua and all the people.

[ 4 : 55 ] The command is delivered, certainly, through Joshua, but the command is directed to all the people. Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them.

All of the people are under orders. All are subject to God's command, and of course, all must obey the command that is given by God.

As we bring these things to ourselves, we know, of course, that this remains the case. Nothing has changed. We who are God's people, we who by grace have been drawn into His family, we who have been commissioned with the task of doing God's bidding in this world, and ourselves very particularly, where God has placed us here in Aberdeen, we are under orders.

We are under orders to preach the good news concerning Jesus Christ. It's not just something that is good to do, not just something that maybe we might enjoy doing, not just something that it would be sensible to do, it is something that we are commanded, that we are ordered to do.

We are commanded to announce the good news. We are commanded to make disciples of all nations. We are commanded to teach everything that the Lord has commanded us.

[ 6 : 21 ] Now, when we think of the world to which we are sent and that we are commissioned to reach, we know that the world is a big place. And, of course, we share the responsibility of reaching this big world with many others.

We are part of the worldwide church of Jesus Christ, and we are, of course, conscious and very grateful for the fact that many others participate with us in the task that we have been given.

God does not expect us to do everything, but we do have to identify those parts of this big world that we are responsible for. We live in this country, in Scotland, so we have a particular responsibility for Scotland.

Again, we might say, well, that's still quite a big mission field, the whole of this great nation. Well, drawing things a little closer to home, surely we have a particular or an even more particular responsibility for this city where God has placed us, for the city of Aberdeen.

And, indeed, if we wished, we could draw things even closer to home and think of the neighborhood or the part of the city where God has placed us. We, as with Joshua and the people of God of old, are commanded by God.

[ 7 : 42 ] This is what God does. God commands. He tells us what we are to do. He tells us that we must take possession of that which is His. So, God commands.

But very much along with the command, we can notice something else that God does, and that is that God assures. He assures His people, along with the command that perhaps could be quite a daunting command.

I'm sure it was a very daunting command to take the Promised Land, to cross the Jordan, to confront these mighty men of war. It was a very daunting command.

It was frightening, I'm sure, for many. We know that previously, the people had buckled under the burden of this command. They had not proved able to stand up to the mark, and so had wandered through the desert for 40 years.

But now, once again, the command is upon them, and once again, no doubt, there would have been many among them who were frightened at what was before them.

[ 8 : 48 ] God is conscious of this, and so He assures them there in the verses that we've already read at the beginning of chapter 1. He promises them that He will be with them, and that He will grant to them the victory.

Get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them, to the Israelites. The assurance, in a sense, isn't simply God saying, I'm going to be with you, I'm going to help you.

The assurance is involved in convincing or persuading the people that actually what they're doing is taking possession of what already belongs to God.

The manner in which God presents it to them is, this belongs to me. This is mine. And what I'm going to do is give it to you. And really all I'm asking you to do is receive what I am going to give to you.

I am about to give to the Israelites this land. It's my land. It belongs to me, and I have decided that I'm going to give it to my people.

[ 10 : 03 ] Irrespective of who the current occupants of the promised land are, irrespective of where their loyalties may lie, the land belongs to the Lord. And as the owner, he declares his intention to give the land to Joshua and the people as a gift.

All they have to do is take possession of the gift. What God is saying to Joshua and to the people is that they shouldn't see themselves, they shouldn't imagine themselves as alien occupiers of enemy territory that does not belong to them.

That should not be their mindset, that somehow they're going to invade enemy territory. Yes, there are enemies in the territory, but the territory is not enemy territory.

The territory belongs to God. They are simply going to take possession. It is a gift that God is giving them, and they must receive the gift. Now, that receiving the gift will involve battles of one kind or another, but at heart, they are to be very clear that this is what is going on.

They are receiving from the rightful owner that which is being given to them. And this is to serve as an assurance to them as they launch in and embark on the task at hand.

[ 11 : 26 ] And when we think of how that applies to ourselves, I think it's important for us also to have that clear in our mindset. Maybe as we look around us in our own city, in our own nation, we appear to live in enemy territory.

We appear to live in territory that is owned by others and where others rule and where other philosophies and manners of thinking and living predominate.

And it can be a very daunting task to think, well, how could we take possession of such a land? How could we embark on such a mission? And while not pretending that it is an easy thing to do, I think it is important and serves as an assurance for us to remember that what God is asking us to do is to take possession of what is His.

He is the owner. He is the owner of this city. He is the owner of this nation. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And He has said, I want to give it to you. I want to give it to you.

What I want you to do is take possession of what belongs to me. So God commands the people and He also assures the people.

[ 12 : 39 ] Now it's true that as we apply this to ourselves, we are not concerned with geographic or territorial occupation, as was the case with Joshua and the people.

Theirs was a territorial taking possession. There was, of course, a spiritual aspect to it, but there was also a very physical, geographic taking possession of a concrete piece of real estate, if you wish.

That is not our concern. But nonetheless, we are to take possession of Scotland. We are to take possession of the hearts and minds of those who live around us or certainly seek that the hearts and minds of those around us would be owned by our Lord.

And as with the promised land, the Lord already has those who are His within the city. We think of the assurances that were given to Paul on this very matter when he was discouraged by much opposition.

And the Lord assured him, I have many people in this city, many people who are already my own, many people upon whom I have set my eyes. They themselves don't even know it yet.

[ 13 : 55 ] They themselves have not yet bowed the knee or confessed with their tongue, but they're mine. I have fixed my eyes upon them. They will be brought to myself. What I want you to do, Paul, is to draw them in.

Draw them in. They're mine already, but you have the privilege of making known the message that will be the means whereby they are brought to recognize the calling that God has upon them.

And so too for ourselves. In our own particular circumstances, situation here in Aberdeen, God has many people in this city.

Our job is to take possession by means of making known and preaching the good news of the gospel. In the case of Jericho, in addition to that physical possession of the city, there was also, or there were also those whom God had fixed His eyes as individuals who would bow the knee before the God of Israel.

Very particularly, of course, we know of Rahab and how God was already preparing this woman, how God was already fixing His eyes upon her that she would be saved on the occasion of this particular conquest.

[ 15 : 16 ] So God promises, God assures, but God also protects and provides for His people as they engage themselves in this warfare, if you wish.

As we turn to chapter 2 that we've read also as the spies are sent to reconnaissance the land, the lie of the land, and to see how it is that they will take possession of this city, we notice there how this task that they are given by Joshua is a dangerous one.

When somebody within Jericho identifies who they are, there is great danger for them. And the king of Jericho discovers that there are spies in the city and he makes efforts to apprehend them.

And we shudder to imagine what the fate would have been for them had they been taken hold of by the king of Jericho. It was dangerous for them.

The owners of this city of Jericho, though it belonged to God, the squatters who were there, if we can call them that, were not going to lie down and roll over. No, they were going to make a fight of it.

[ 16 : 31 ] And as a result, there was danger for God's people, though the ultimate victory was secure. Nonetheless, there was real danger that was present for them in the taking of this city.

But though there was very real danger, they were protected by God. The verses that we have read describe that and we don't need to dwell on it.

As we think of ourselves, we too, as we would seek to take possession of that which God would have us take possession of, we too should expect opposition.

We too should expect those who will stand against us in the work that we seek to do, as was the case with the spies. When we venture into enemy territory, not that it belongs to the enemy, but occupied by the enemy, as we venture into that territory, we should expect increasing opposition, even to the simple declaration of the truth of the Scriptures without apology.

And we're seeing something of that already. We don't want to dramatize the case for ourselves, especially when we compare how other Christians suffer in other lands. It would be foolish of us to over-dramatize the opposition we can face.

[ 17 : 53 ] But there is opposition, and it is increasing in scale and in hostility. I wonder if we, and I ask the question of myself, as I would invite you to ask it of yourself, and as we would ask it of ourselves, congregationally, I wonder how much opposition we do actually experience in our Christian ministry.

Maybe it's the case that we experience very little, and there might be merit in just pondering on why that might be. I wonder if part of the reason is that we remain, if I can use the language of the account that we're talking about, we remain on the wrong side of the Jordan.

As long as the people remained on the other side of the Jordan, they would have had a reasonably simple life. The danger comes when they cross the Jordan. The danger comes when they go, the spies in particular, head to Jericho.

There they're in much more danger than had they remained behind amidst the protection of all the people on the other side of the Jordan. I wonder if for us sometimes it's the case that we experience very little opposition because we keep a very safe distance from Jericho.

But the spies who are willing to respond to God's command through Joshua, they enjoy the protection of God and they enjoy this protection via or through the provision of this woman, Rahab.

[ 19 : 26 ] Now she was, as no doubt has often been commented, a very unlikely ally of God's people. She was a prostitute and she was called by God.

But when God calls, who can resist? Certainly Rahab did not do so. And that, as well, is just one snapshot that should encourage us and should excite us as to the prospects and the plans and the purposes of God in our own city.

Who might He be calling? And might it not be that He is calling the most unlikely to serve the purposes of God's people and indeed to become part of God's people.

And so God, in this matter of the taking of this city, is involved in different ways. He commands the people, He assures the people of His help and of His protection.

He protects and provides for the people and then, of course, when it comes to the occupation itself, He delivers the city into their hands.

[ 20 : 32 ] And here, we're not going to dwell on the details. But simply to make the point, it's so evident in the manner in which Jericho was taken that the whole purpose was to highlight that this was God's work.

The people were to remain silent as they went and marched around the city. And I wonder what the folk of Jericho thought as they witnessed this. It's true that we've already been told that they were trembling at the approach of the Israelites, largely because of what they had already heard of previous military victories that they'd enjoyed.

But I wonder what they thought when they saw the people just marching around the walls of the city. It didn't appear, perhaps, particularly threatening. And all of this, of course, highlighting that when, in due course, the walls did come tumbling down, this was so evidently and so dramatically a God's work.

And so God it is who delivers over to the people of this city that He had promised. So God does so much. God is, of course, the prime mover.

But it is also true that the people are involved. God is pleased to involve His people, to grant us the privilege of participating. God's people are not simply to sit back and observe God at work.

[ 21 : 54 ] What do the people do? And by extension, what do we do? Well, really, we can answer that with one word which we'll briefly develop. What the people have to do is simply to obey.

The king commands and the subjects obey. And not just Joshua, though he is the one who receives, as it were, the command. But all of the people are given this responsibility and opportunity and privilege of obeying God.

For the people who were involved in the taking of Jericho, what did this obedience involve? Well, it involved taking possession of what God was giving them. We've already stressed that this is a gift that God is giving them.

We can think of it as a gift that is prepared, it's wrapped, and it's simply being presented to them. But they must receive the gift. And this reception of the gift is described for us in the manner in which they take possession of Jericho.

This taking possession involves different aspects. At one level, and we've read the verses in chapter 2, it involves seeing and investigating the lie of the land.

[ 23 : 15 ] The spies are sent. We've read the passage in chapter 2. And I suppose what that really stresses for us is that the reality of God's promise that He will give them this city does not mean that Joshua is relieved of the need to prepare with care and attention to detail what is involved in taking Jericho.

We might have thought that Joshua would have said, well, God has promised that He's going to hand this over to us. Then why bother with spies and intelligence missions? It's unnecessary.

God has spoken. God is powerful. It's such a simple thing for God to hand over the city. Why do I need to bother with spies and the like? But it is not so. It was right and proper that Joshua do as he did.

And the lessons there for us are not difficult to draw out. Yes, God has promised to give to us those whom He has called, those whom He has chosen.

He has promised to give to us that which we must take possession of. But that does not relieve us of the responsibility of studying and investigating the lie of the land.

[ 24 : 28 ] If we think of one particular aspect, if we are to be involved in planting new churches in Scotland, in this city, it's not something we just do without thinking about or investigating or exploring or determining the best way of going about that.

It might involve considerable preparation and work and research and seeking advice and help of others. Yes, it is God who will grant us the victory, but that does not relieve us of the responsibility of carefully and diligently doing the preparatory work if you wish.

But then, of course, there is the actual conquest itself. This actual conquest that they engage in as they march around the city and ultimately take possession of it.

This actual conquest grounded in the promise of God. In chapter 6 where we have it described, once again, God assures them, then the Lord said to Joshua, there in verse 2, see I have delivered Jericho into your hands.

Even the manner in which God speaks, not I will deliver, I have delivered. It's a done deal. There's no prospect, no possibility of things not concluding in the manner that I have already determined.

[ 25 : 43 ] I have delivered Jericho. And so, the people engage in the physical occupation in that confidence, grounded in the promise of God. The conquest as well is characterized by the manner in which Joshua and those who exercise leadership of the people lead from the front as it were.

Joshua is given orders that will involve priests in carrying the ark, in blowing the trumpets, and that the people accompany them. But there is a need for spiritual leadership on the part of those whom God has called to lead His people.

And I think we can safely say that ordinarily in God's purposes it is unlikely for us to see spiritual advance, gospel advance, where there are not leaders whom God has placed over His people who will take the lead and rally the people and model to the people the faith that is necessary.

And that is a call to reflection for those of us who have been given by God this responsibility of spiritual leadership. But it is not the leaders alone.

The leaders are supported by the people. We know that they are involved there in verse 7 of chapter 6. Joshua ordered the people advance, march around the city with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.

[ 27 : 10 ] What were the people doing? And what were they declaring by what they were doing? Well, we know they were marching around the city of Jericho. And again, the question emerges, what could possibly be gained by doing this?

You can maybe imagine some of the younger men saying to Joshua, well, this is a waste of time. Why don't we just attack the city and take it straight away? But as they marched around the city and particularly as they did so accompanying the ark of the covenant, a symbol of God's presence, they were declaring their dependence upon God.

That is what they were doing. They were declaring their dependence upon a God and they were declaring that it was God and God alone who would grant them the victory. We must do the same. The manner in which we will do so is different.

The manner in which we demonstrate our dependence on God is the measure in which we pray to God, the measure in which we call out to God for His help. That is how we demonstrate our dependence upon God.

It is with prayer that we can be used of God to take possession of what He would give to us. Well, let's draw things to a close. There are these two elements, what God does and what we do.

[ 28 : 25 ] And the promises of God go hand in hand with the obedience of God's people. Or to put it another way, our faith in the promises is demonstrated in our obedience.

This is eloquently expressed for us in the New Testament in Hebrews in chapter 11 and verse 30. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell after the people had marched around them for seven days.

God, of course, miraculously brought down the walls. And yet, the writer to the Hebrews can describe it also from this perspective. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell.

This faith, the faith of Joshua, and the faith also of the people was a faith grounded in an appreciation of God's covenant dealings with them.

Joshua himself, on the eve of this great conquest, was given this assurance that the God who would grant them the victory was the God who had been going with them, the God who had gone before Moses, before him.

[ 29 : 27 ] We read in chapter 5 of Joshua this mysterious encounter with the commander of the Lord's army. And the question is, well, who is this mysterious figure?

And time doesn't allow us to delve into it in great detail, but what I would simply highlight, words that I'm sure for Joshua were such a clear confirmation as to who it was that was granting him an assurance of victory when the commander of the Lord's army there in verse 15 says to Joshua, take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy.

The message was clear. The very same words that had been addressed to Moses at the burning bush now addressed to Joshua. And God was declaring to Joshua, I am the God of Moses who delivered this people from Egypt and I am also your God.

I am the God of Joshua and I will hand Jericho into your hands. And that same God comes to us and says, I am the God of my people here in Aberdeen in Scotland and I too as I have done of old will deliver into your hands all those whom I have prepared for you.

and as God promised that to Joshua so he kept his promise. And so at the end of chapter 6 we read these final words, so the Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land and so he is and will be with us also.

[ 30 : 52 ] Let us pray. Heavenly Father Amen. Amen.