

Third Sunday of Lent, February 24, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Joshua 6:14-20

"How to Have an Overcoming Faith" (part 2)

THE WAIT OF FAITH

Now there is a fourth key to having an overcoming faith. It's found in **Joshua 6:14-15**:

"On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days. On the seventh day they rose early at dawn, and marched around the city the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city. Seven times."

Not just one time or twice, or three times or four times or five or six times, but seven times in one day do they march around the city. And they've already been doing this for six days! I can imagine someone saying, "Now wait a minute. This is ridiculous. We did it once, it didn't work. We did it twice, it didn't work. We've done it six days, it still hasn't worked. And here we are on the seventh day, we've been marched around the city not just once but six times in one day and still nothing has happened. I'm tired. I quit!" But if they had done that, the walls would still be standing.

What was God doing? God was teaching them a great lesson: the lesson of patience, the lesson of waiting on the Lord. You see if there is the way of faith, the worship of faith, the work of faith, then there is also the wait of faith: waiting on the Lord God.

Now don't think that when you wait on the Lord, you're wasting time. You're not wasting time. Yes, it's hard, but what's going on? You're allowing the Lord to do what needs to be done in His time and according to His will. And what is done in His time is always for our good.

Listen for a moment to **Isaiah 30:18**: ***"Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore He will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; (and) blessed are all those who wait for Him."***

Everything God does is rooted in His love. He is a God of mercy and grace. Why does He fail to answer our prayers right away? Because He knows what is best for us, better than we know ourselves. He sees the big picture – past, present and future. Something that we can't fully see in this life. He is first and foremost concerned with our character, not our physical condition. He wants us to find our contentment in Him not in the things of this world. And one of the ways we grow into the person God wants us to be is through waiting on the Lord. Waiting for Him to act.

And notice the promise given for those that wait. Notice what is true about those who wait on the Lord – ***"Blessed are all they that wait for Him."*** There is a blessing to be had when we wait. Because when we wait, we allow the Lord to do His work, to work out His will in our lives.

The Bible says in **Gal. 6:9**: ***"And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time***

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we shall reap if we do not grow weary." And in **Hebrews 10:36** we are told: ***For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For in a very little while, the One who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith.***"

Moreover, **Hebrews 13:5,6** tells us: ***"Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "the Lord is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"***"

Now there are some here this morning who are just about ready to quit. Some who are discouraged, downcast and defeated. Well, the Lord says, Look up and wait upon Him. Don't give up. Don't let up. Keep your faith in God. **For an overcoming faith is marked by endurance and by not quitting.**

And what is the promise for those who wait on the Lord? ***"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*** (Is. 40:31-33).

THE WORD OF FAITH

Now the next thing I want you to see is not only the wait of faith, but there is a fifth key, the word of faith. Please look at **Joshua 6:16: (On the seventh day)...they marched around the city...seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout!" For the Lord has given you the city.**"

Not the Lord will give you, but the Lord ***"has given you."*** How could Joshua say, it's been done when it hadn't been done? Because it had already been done in the heart and mind of God. Even though it had not been done physically yet, it had already been done by faith. And Joshua knew it was as good as done and therefore, Joshua said, The Lord HAS, not will, but HAS given you the city. Joshua could say this because **Joshua knew the Word of God.**

Remember what the Lord said to Joshua earlier in **6:2**? He said, ***"See I have handed over Jericho to you."*** Not I will, but ***I have.*** Now what was Joshua doing? Joshua was speaking a word of faith. A word that he already received. But where did he get that word of faith? He got his word of faith from the Word of God.

You have heard me say the following before, and I will keep on saying it and reminding you. **Romans 10:17: "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."** Joshua did not just decide there was something he wanted and therefore, he would believe for it. That's not faith. That's positive thinking. Faith is not just cooking up something you wish and saying, I'm going to believe God for it. You cannot just believe God for something and make it so. You can only believe God for something that already is in the heart and mind of God. You see God had already said, ***"I have given you the city."*** And therefore, Joshua trusted God's Word and believed it was there for his people.

That my friends is faith. Simply agreeing with the word of God. You see the Lord must speak before you can have faith. Either He shall speak in His Word or by His Spirit or by a combination of two, but God speaks to you and faith is your reaction to what God has said.

That's why we need to be walking with the Lord and worshipping the Lord and waiting upon the Lord so that we can hear Lord and believe Him and what He has said.

Now, look the reason some of us don't have any faith is we don't know what God is saying. We never hear God speak. Do you pray? Do you know what to pray? The truth is the prayer that gets to heaven is the prayer that starts in heaven. We just close the circuit. Here's what prayer is. Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father and putting that desire into our hearts and then sending it back to heaven in the power of the cross. That is powerful prayer. Knowing the will of God, hearing the Word of God, and then praying a word of faith.

Now often times we aren't walking, worshipping, or listening to the Lord enough to know what He's saying. We come running to God with our petitions and our prayers and we say, "Listen Lord, Your servant speaks," when we ought to be saying, "Speak Lord, Your servant hears. Speak Lord, What is your will?" Joshua knew the will of God because he knew the Word of God. And therefore he could say to his people, ***Shout for the Lord has given you the city!*** God speaks and it is as good as done.

But there isn't just the word of faith, there is also the wonder of faith.

THE WONDER OF FAITH

Notice again in **Joshua 6:20**: ***"So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets and it came about that when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout that the wall fell down flat so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city."***

Even though the wicked city of Jericho stood between the people of God and the promises of God, the city's walls fell, and God's people went by faith to claim their possession. God works wonders when His people believe in Him. God is still in the miracle working business and He still wants to work wonders for us; that we can experience the victory that is ours in Christ, so that the walls of every obstacle can crumble and so that our spiritual enemies can be vanquished, and that we, every one of us, can know victory not by trying in the flesh but by trusting in the Spirit. But such victory only comes through an overcoming faith.

Many of you know that my mother was recently diagnosed with cancer. She had surgery this past Wednesday. Thanks be to God her surgery went well and the doctor feels that the cancer was contained. Now she had known about the cancer diagnoses for about a month. And what did she do, did she worry and fret? Did she curl up in a fetal position and say, "Woe's me?" No, she had a positive attitude.

Why could she have a positive attitude? Because of her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, this wasn't the first time she had cancer. She was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease some fifty years ago when she was fourteen years old. Back then this form of cancer was 99% fatal. But she had a doctor who, it turns out probably was ahead of his time in treating it, and she took special medication for ten years and also underwent radiation treatments. But even with the treatments, her doctor called her a walking miracle. She wasn't supposed to survive.

Now fast forward to my younger brother, Adam. At age fourteen, he too was diagnosed

with cancer, a rare form of cancer of the muscle tissue in the bladder. When my parents and I got the terrible news we didn't let it keep us from moving forward in faith. As a family we trusted in the Lord. My mom knew that she miraculously survived Hodgkin's so she had complete confidence that God could deliver her son. Adam had a 50/50 chance of surviving. After six weeks of radiation and two years of chemo he got through it. Was it tough? You bet it was. How did we get through it? The same way Joshua overcame Jericho. Looking to Jesus, worshipping the Lord Christ, obeying him, waiting on Him, speaking and believing the Word and being ready for when God acted miraculously. And God did act.

Adam survived and he lived a relatively normal life for the next fifteen years until he was diagnosed with a different form of cancer at age 31. He had to go through chemo again. But God sustained him for eighteen months until he was called home on October 21, 2004. Many of you remember that time. Many of you were here.

Now there's a lot of whys we can ask and we can wonder about this problem and that problem and look at all the negatives. But that isn't the life of faith. We will never see God's purpose and plan in our lives fulfilled if we stay with the questions. We will never experience the peace and power of God if we focus on the problems. Rather, we need to follow and focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to worship and obey Him. We need to wait for Him and believe His Holy Word. And when we do we will see the Wonder of Faith, we will see His mighty working power in our lives.

In fact, over the years, I have learned not to ask, "Why?" But simply to say, "Wow." Because through it all I know God is working out His perfect plan. Through it all I know God is accomplishing His perfect will. If He isn't, I might as well just throw in the towel and stay home. But the truth is, He is. And I can either get on board for an incredible ride to my final destination, heaven. Or I can miss that train, and never ever find or experience the victory that is in Jesus Christ. Do you want to see the walls of your Jericho come tumbling down? It is found in having an overcoming faith. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!