

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the
righteous run to it and are safe.

All: **Rich people imagine that their wealth
protects them like high, strong walls around a
city.**

MP 809

Blessed be the name of the Lord

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray:

The tomb could not hold you, our living God.
You have broken down the walls that keep us from you.
We praise you, great redeemer.
Fear could not bind you, courageous Lord.
You tell your followers not to be afraid.
You have shown us that you are with us when the world is at its darkest.
You bring us light, new and shining with glory.

We praise you, Lord, we sing your praises.

Evil could not overpower you, the source of all goodness.
You have conquered death and set your people free.
You are the God of earth and heaven, and all else there ever was.
We praise you for your power and your righteousness.
We praise you for love beyond our knowing.

We praise you, Lord, we sing your praises.

Breathe your freedom into us, Lord Jesus when we lock ourselves away
within walls of our own making.
The walls of what other people will think if we say we believe.
Breathe your freedom into us, Lord Jesus when we doubt your promises, and
ignore the proof you give in our own lives.
Let your love unlock the door of our doubts,
and pour upon us your blessing of belief.
We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us
not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the
power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

Children's address

MP 1009

The King of love is my delight

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Joshua 6:1-5, 15-20 (OT page 220)

Reader: Andrew Thomson

Background to the reading

Jericho (modern Tell es-Sultan), was strategically located, having a large oasis in a region where water was precious and controlling the main roads into the interior.

The story of Israel's first victory in the land is told in exquisite detail. Just as the crossing of the Jordan was treated as an important event to be solemnly undertaken, with proper ritual preparation and commemoration, so also the taking of Jericho was to be done properly and in order. The Lord's instructions to Joshua display the character of the covenant. God graciously gave Israel the land, but they must make it theirs by obeying faithfully. The ritual nature of the episode is suggested by the absence of any military strategy, by the blowing of the trumpets, by the prominence of the priests and the ark of the covenant, by the solemn processions, and by the prevalence of the number "seven," which occurs four times in v. 4 alone and fourteen times in the chapter. "Seven" is the number of totality, completion, and perfection in the Scriptures and its predominance in this chapter emphasizes the completeness of Yahweh's victory on Israel's behalf.

The detail with which the account is told emphasizes the importance of this city and its destruction. It was the first city captured by the Israelites, and, as such, its capture represented the entire takeover of the land.

Verse One sets the stage for the episode at Jericho. The problem is stated: Jericho was "tightly shut up." This would appear to have been a dual problem: it was a problem for the inhabitants of Jericho, since it was "because of the Israelites" that this happened, but it also was a problem for the Israelites, since their task of taking the city was made all that much harder because of this. The difficulty of the task magnified the great accomplishment of the taking of the city when it did take place. In this sense, v. 1 functions to show a great potential obstacle that is then overcome effortlessly by the mighty action of God.

The first instruction that the army was to march around the city about 650 yds once a day for six days. The cities in ancient times were not big at all. The second instruction that seven priests were to bear seven trumpets of ram's horn before the ark. The third instruction that the seven priests were to march seven times on the seventh day. The fourth instruction that the people were to give an earth-shaking shout when they heard the last blast of the horns. The fifth command that each warrior was to attack the city straight ahead after the walls fell, found its consummation when they 'devoted' the city to the Lord.

Joshua repeated the orders which applied to the priests and then those which applied to the people. The ark is mentioned first for God is the King (cf. 3:2-4). Joshua creatively deployed some armed men as a vanguard before the priests blowing trumpets and others as a rearguard behind the ark (9). In this way the divine King assumed his rightful place at the heart of his sacred warriors.

As the holy army was marching in solemn procession, the seven priests were blowing the trumpets and the armed men, on Joshua's orders, were as silent as granite. This went on for six days. The drawn out style of the dramatic narrative matches the drawn out march.

On the seventh day, the actions were the same as previously, but they were executed seven times on this day. The second half of v. 15 shows that it was only on this day and no other that this happened. The marching action on the seventh day is described much more quickly than for days one and two, since the story's climax quickly approaches.

In strict accord with God's instructions (vv. 4-5), Joshua commanded the people to shout when the priests gave one long, sustained blast on their horns. Once again, the already-accomplished fact that the Lord had given Israel the land is reported. The report of the execution of his command is delayed until v. 20, however, by his instructions regarding the Israelites' treatment of Rahab and their handling of the things that had been devoted to destruction.

The actual "battle" of Jericho is described very briefly in v. 20, and the story line suspended after v. 16 is now resumed, with the report of the execution of Joshua's command that the people should shout. The story reaches its climax here, and the terse telling of the climactic moments has a dramatic effect. When the people heard the sound of the ram's horn, they shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down under itself and the people invaded and captured the city.

So what did this episode mean to the people of Israel?

The fall of Jericho would become the symbol of destruction for the whole land of Canaan. But it also became the symbol of hope to the people of Israel for they knew that God could be trusted to take care of their future. They also had to learn that they must obey God and His commands. In short: they all knew, God gave them the victory! They had no part in it.

MP 881

Lord, I lift Your name on high

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon is Verse 20:

“When the people heard the sound of the rams' horns, they shouted as loud as they could. Suddenly, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it.”

Our story has one central message: God gave his people the victory over Jericho without one arrow being shot.

In the New Testament God did it again. I am referring to the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. He broke off all the walls that parted/separated us from God. He broke down all the walls of sin and brokenness in us. He broke down all the walls that hindered us to have a meaningful relationship with God. He broke down all the walls within us that makes us captives of our own situations and circumstances. He did this all, once again just like He did a long time ago in Jericho without using force or violence or military action.

It is amazing to see how different God is when looking at the telly footage of the North Korean dictator openly proclaiming war, destruction and violence. Jesus was truly God who did not threaten. Instead He included rather than excluded. Instead of spreading rumours of violence, war and hatred He proclaimed peace and love.

Today is known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is a stark reminder of the impact of actions of people who wage war and proclaim violence against other people. It is also a reminder of how dangerous and alien it is for followers of Jesus, to exclude certain people, to have racial prejudices.

Sometimes we can erect walls that separates us not only from God but also from other people by our prejudices and prejudgments. Sometimes our pain can become walls where we refuse to allow others in. Sometimes our

bereavement can become a wall between us and our wife's/husbands/partners/children/grandchildren and other people. Sometimes our walls can be so high that it reaches the sky, where we do not want to allow anyone in.

But God can break it down. He can free us from the darkness that a high wall around us causes. He can release us when we are nothing more than prisoners imprisoned by our own situations and circumstances.

Yes without bullets and using violence God freed us all from the bondages of sin and death and hell. He broke down each and every brick that divided us from His light and love.

If you are sitting in this church and you feel that you are a prisoner of your own circumstances and that all you see is the thick, high walls around you, then please shout out to God and ask him to release you. He already did and will do so again and again...

Shout to the Lord and imagine all the walls crumbling around you, all those walls you have erected over many years, walls that make your life dark and isolated, walls that is unnecessary and just burdens.

Amen

Responding to God's word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **JP 28: "Colours of day"**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Dora Bennett

MP 269

I do not know what lies ahead

Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:

Jesus came and stood among the disciples,
saying, 'Peace be with you'.

Lord where there are families in distress,
help us walk beside them, saying, 'Peace be with you'.

Lord, in the playground or park,
where children fight or disagree,
put us among them to say, 'Peace be with you'.

Lord, where there is stress in the workplace
and tension between colleagues, make us present
to say 'Peace be with you'.

Give us your peace, Lord, and make us peacemakers.

And the blessing of God our Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be with you now and for evermore

Sung Amen