

“Partners in faith: Joshua”

Joshua 24: 14,15

Wayne Eberly

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Joshua lived to be 110 years old. There are 52 weeks in a year. Joshua lived 5,720 weeks. There are 365 days in a year. Joshua lived 40,150 days. There are 24 hours in a day. Joshua lived 963,600 hours. There are 60 minutes in an hour. Joshua lived 57,816,000 minutes. Joshua lived all those years and weeks and days and minutes and yet for many people, all they know about Joshua is one week, and in particular one day, and even more specifically, one moment. The moment people know about Joshua is when the trumpets sounded and the walls of the city of Jericho came...tumblin' down.

I'm not saying there is anything surprising about the fact that Joshua is so well known for that one particular moment. I am definitely not saying we should ignore the significance of Joshua and the battle of Jericho, or that we should downplay that defining moment when the walls fell. When people face the seemingly impenetrable, intractable, and impossible walls of life, how many have been inspired by Joshua to stand fast and to stand firm against those walls, in the sure hope and the strong belief that God will bring down the walls of adversity? There is a reason a song like Joshua fit the battle of Jericho sticks in your mind. We need Joshua to fight that battle of Jericho, because it reminds us of what God can do and it inspires us to have faith in what God will do. That single and defining moment in the life of Joshua matters. That one single moment is literally momentous. As it should be.

Friends, I am not saying anything against Joshua and the battle of Jericho. In fact, I want to remind you of that defining moment. In Joshua chapter six the story begins with these daunting and imposing words. “Now the gates of Jericho were securely shut.” Jericho was a fortress. But Jericho and its mighty walls was vulnerable. Setting his sights on Jericho, the Lord gave Joshua his instructions.

- March around the city once with all the armed men.
- Do this for six days.

- Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark (of the covenant).
- On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.
- 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.

Joshua lived 110 years, but that one week, walking around Jericho, those seven days must have etched an indelible memory in his mind. What was Joshua wondering as he made that daily loop around the walls?

Day one...did God really say the wall would fall? But instead of stirring doubt, Joshua remembered that God had only to speak and in six days the whole world came into being. And so Joshua said, "The wall will fall."

Day two...did God really say the wall would fall? But instead of stirring doubt, Joshua remembered how Pharaoh and his minions squirmed as the waters of the Nile turned to blood, as flies and gnats and locusts swept down on their oppressors, as boils and hail and darkness covered the entire land of Egypt. And so Joshua said, "The wall will fall."

Day three...did God really say the wall would fall? But instead of stirring doubt, Joshua remembered how at the Lord's command Moses had raised the staff and the waters of the Red Sea were split right in two, walls of water rising on both sides so Israel could pass through in the middle on dry land. And so Joshua said, "The wall will fall."

Day four...did God really say the wall would fall? But instead of stirring doubt as he looked up at those massive walls, Joshua remembered the day he and all Israel looked up and saw bread raining down from heaven...a heavenly blessing that lasted forty whole years. And so Joshua said, "The wall will fall."

Day five...did God really say the wall would fall? When the people claimed to be dying of thirst in the oppressive heat of the desert, God told Moses to take the same staff that parted the waters of the Red Sea

and strike a rock. Water gushed forth from the rock. And so Joshua said, “The wall will fall.”

Day six...did God really say the wall would fall? During those dog days in the desert a rebellion arose against Moses. The riff raff who raised the complaint were swallowed up when the earth split in two. And so Joshua said, “The wall will fall.”

Day seven...did God really say the wall would fall? On that seventh day as they circled the city seven times, Joshua thought back to a recent event, when he himself had led Israel into the Promised Land, when the people had come right up against the banks of the Jordan River, how God had firmly established Joshua as the leader by stopping the waters, waters raging at flood stage, allowing the new Moses to lead his people across on dry land. And so with steely resolve and rock solid faith Joshua said, “The wall will fall.”

And so it is that a man who lived 110 years became defined by one single moment. Joshua fit the battle of Jericho...and the walls came tumblin’ down. The wall did fall. No, I am not saying anything against Joshua and the battle of Jericho.

But at the same time, I do want to say there is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho. Don’t we miss something if we only focus on this one event.

- Neil Armstrong took something like 216,262,500 steps in his lifetime. There is more to Neil Armstrong than the one small step he took for man and the one giant leap he took for mankind way back when he planted his foot on the moon.
- Judy Garland starred in 34 movies, and in those movies she wore countless pairs of shoes. There is more to Judy Garland than those ruby slippers.
- Painful New England sports memories for a thousand. Bill Buckner played in 2,517 games in a career that spanned more than two decades. Red Sox fans, there is more to Bill Buckner than one ground ball in the 1986 World Series.
- Thomas Edison had patents on 1,093 inventions. There is more to Thomas Edison than the light bulb.

- There was more to Lincoln than the Gettysburg Address.
- There is more to San Francisco than the Golden Gate Bridge...to New York City than the Empire State Building....to China than the Great Wall...to the French than French fries...to McDonald's than hamburgers. Haven't you ever heard of the McRib Sandwich?
- There is more to Dallas than J.R. Ewing, more to Chicago than their hot dogs, more to Pizza than pepperoni, more to Betsy Ross than the American flag, to Francis Scott Key than the National Anthem, to Benjamin Franklin than a kite.
- Believe it or not there is more to Bernie Sanders than a pair of mittens!
- And yes, there is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho.

When Joshua comes to the walls of that fortified city we know as Jericho, we are in the sixth chapter of Joshua. There are still eighteen chapters to go in the book of Joshua. There is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho. And the more is not just what comes after Jericho. By the time Joshua gets to Jericho, he has already been a part of the Exodus and wilderness and Promised Land saga since way back in Exodus 17. Joshua has already been with us through the final 23 chapters in Exodus, the 27 chapters of Leviticus, the 36 chapters in Numbers, and all 34 chapters in Deuteronomy. Jericho plays a prominent role in the life of Joshua. But that one moment is not all there is to Joshua. There is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho. If you add it all up, Joshua is part of this foundational story in the life of Israel for 144 chapters, plus he even appears in the first two chapters of the book of Judges.

And it is not just the breadth and scope of his involvement in what is truly the foundational experience for the people of God, but Joshua's role is amplified because he is the one who succeeds Moses as the leader of the Israelites. If all we know about Joshua is that he fit the battle of Jericho, we miss the unique opportunity to see how God raises up a young person, how God puts that person in situations to learn and to be tested and tried, how God provides a mentor to guide and shape his steps, how God brings him in close to see transformational moments, how God places the mantle of leadership on his shoulders, how God blesses him with words and the power to make him equal to the task, and

in the end how God walks with him until he too passes the torch on to those who follow. Because what Joshua experienced in his one lifetime is what the church experiences over and over again in our lifetime, that process of raising up leaders, training, mentoring, guiding, shepherding, entrusting, equipping, following, and then doing it all over again and again and again, we make a grave mistake if we put Joshua in a box called Jericho and neglect the powerful truth that there is so much more to Joshua than those seven days and that one giant wall that crashes to the ground.

I don't even know where to begin with what it would take to prepare a person to succeed a leader like Moses, a leader who was such a larger-than-life figure. But if we begin at the beginning, at the first moment we meet Joshua, we benefit greatly from noting the many and varied experiences that shaped the life of Joshua.

- The first time we are introduced to Joshua is in Exodus 17 when the Israelites go to fight the Amalekites. Moses sent Joshua out to lead the troops into battle. We can imagine the lessons learned as he faced off in combat, but we take particular interest in the lesson Joshua learned every time he would look back at his mentor Moses. That was the day Moses watched the battle from a hill. As long as Moses could raise his arms the battle went in favor of Israel. Joshua saw that day that great leaders get exhausted, that great leaders give in to fatigue. But if the leader has support, if the leader has ones who stand on the left and the right and lift those tired arms, leaders can persevere through the struggle. Lesson one in terms of leadership. Get yourself an Aaron and a Hur.
- The very next thing Joshua observed was the mighty Moses getting a lecture from his father-in-law Jethro. Jethro sat him down and told Moses he was wearing himself out, and all the people as well. Moses was trying to judge every single case that came his way. Jethro said, "Select capable ones from the people, ones who fear God, who are trustworthy, who hate dishonest gain, and appoint them as leaders over smaller groups." If lesson one was get an Aaron on the right and a Hur on the left, lesson two followed immediately on the heels. Get a whole cadre of leaders, a community of leaders, and make this a team effort.

- When the covenant was confirmed, the covenant on Mount Sinai, the covenant that was symbolized by the Ten Commandments, when Moses went up to confirm that covenant with the Lord, “Moses set out with Joshua his aide...” Exodus 24:13 To be a leader of the people of God is to be obedient to the word of God, to the covenant of God revealed in the word of God. Do not let these words depart from you. Joshua learned that lesson first hand, on the mountain.
- Joshua would learn that to lead the people would bring him not only into direct contact with the written word of God, with the words of the covenant, Joshua would come into direct contact with God himself. Exodus 33 describes Moses entering the tent of meeting. As Moses would enter the tent, the pillar of the cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord would speak to Moses. Moses would speak face to face with the Lord, and then return to the people. When Moses would return, we are told, “But his young aide Joshua did not leave the tent.” (Exodus 33:11) Joshua was being nurtured in a relationship with God that was intimate and personal.
- Much happens over those extended years in the wilderness, including Joshua being one of the twelve who scouts out the Promised Land. Joshua, inspired by Caleb, also stands up and calls the people to trust God and follow the Lord’s leading. While Joshua again stands out for his courage, it is in the midst of these trials and travails that Moses stumbles and is forbidden to enter the Promised Land. It must have pained Joshua to see his mentor stumble, but that in itself is a vital lesson in spiritual leadership. No matter who we are and how devoted we are to God, we all fall short. We put our faith in God, not in human leaders. So the day came when God revealed that Joshua would succeed Moses.
- The Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him...Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him...Moses did as the Lord commanded...He laid his hands on him and commissioned him.”
- When Moses died, it was Joshua who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. The final handoff is rich and reverent, filled with

words of blessing and a call to boldness. Three times as Deuteronomy ends and the book of Joshua begins the Lord says to the people in general and to Joshua in particular, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Three other times the Lord says to Joshua, and to Joshua alone, “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead this people...Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant gave you...do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night...Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:6-9)

There is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho. And if we want a quick study in how calling, training, equipping, nurturing, providing opportunities to succeed...providing opportunities to fail...supporting, encouraging, coming alongside, and standing alongside leaders and future leaders...if we want a quick study in how this whole process is a vital part of being a community of faith, we find it in the life of Joshua. If we only focus on Joshua and the battle, we can fall into a terrible trap. If we only focus on Joshua and the battle of Jericho, when that wall falls, we think the story is over. The story is not over. The story of Joshua does not begin with the battle of Jericho and it does not end with the battle of Jericho. Focus only on Jericho and we miss the call the church has to invest in future leaders, to call leaders, to call all people to follow, to call all people to faithful living, to call all people to explore their gifts and talents and put those gifts and talents into practice.

If we focus only on Joshua and the battle of Jericho, we miss the chance to stand in a great assembly as that 110 year old man named Joshua makes his final address to the people of God. On that day he knew his time as leader was coming to an end. Imagine that day. Joshua was the link to the legend. A baby had been born and placed in a basket in the bullrushes. That baby grew up to be Moses. Moses had an assistant named Joshua. As Moses led, Joshua learned. As Moses stepped aside, Joshua stepped forward. And now that very Joshua has a few final things to say.

“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped...and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14,15)

There is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho. Here at the end, after a lifetime of learning, a lifetime of living, a lifetime of leading, the community of faith is called to embrace the Lord and to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. Isn't that what we are called to do? With every fiber of our being we are called to serve God. We are called to spend ourselves not only serving the Lord but striving to be a community where people of all ages can hear the call of discipleship, where people of all ages can grow in the call of discipleship, where people of all ages can lead in the call of discipleship, and where people of all ages can pass that call of discipleship on to the next generation.

There is more to Joshua than the battle of Jericho. There is a leader passing the mantle. There is a leader calling a community to embrace the mantle. There is a leader calling a community to carry the mantle. With his final words there is a leader calling a people to embrace, to carry, and to pass on the mantle of faith.

Joshua, whose life included so much more than that battle of Jericho, is calling out to us.

“Choose ye this day whom you will serve.”

May we rise up as a unified body of believers to answer Joshua's call with a stirring affirmation of faith. May we say together, with one voice, because we have one Lord, may we say together, ***“As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”***