

Ten Spiritual Precursors to Victory

Joshua 5:13-15

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, December 4th 2022

I. Introduction - fitting this into the book as a whole

One of the interesting contrasts you will find in this book is the contrast seen when comparing chapters 6 and 8 with chapters 7 and 9. In chapters 6 and 8 God gives Israel remarkable victories. In chapters 7 & 9 He gives them remarkable defeats; totally unexpected defeats. The only factors in those chapters that can account for the different outcomes are unseen factors. It wasn't the number of swords, the skill of the warriors or anything else that was visible. Instead, what looked like an easy, guaranteed victory at Ai turned into a resounding defeat because of prayerlessness and sin. On the other hand, in chapter 6 Israel had a resounding victory over Jericho because of the spiritual dimensions involved. If God's blessing is not upon our endeavors, and if He does not prosper the work of our hands, our striving will be losing.

And this affects even little things like your daily work. I don't know how many times I have dived into work without seeking God's blessing, and God let's me know what kind of work I can do – I am inefficient, have interruptions, have computer crashes, and other problems. On the other hand, when I depend upon God's Spirit in prayer, He shows me what *He* can do – I accomplish far more than I thought possible, and am far more effective. And you would think that after all of those times when this has inevitably happened that I would learn. But we all need reminders. That's why I have accountability partners who can encourage me and nudge me to prayer, and why I encourage and nudge them.

And today's sermon is a nudge like that. This is a reminder sermon that for the work that God calls you to, there must be ten spiritual factors present if we are to succeed.

II. Background - the invisible conflict over cities (v. 13,15)

But before we get into those ten factors, let me give a little background. The book of Joshua is a book that concentrates on both the visible and the invisible conflict that occurred over cities. There are a lot of lessons that the visible armies in a Christian state can learn from this book. I read that Stonewall Jackson taught from both Joshua and Judges in his war college. There is a lot of cool stuff that can be learned about visible battles. But Hebrews 4 makes clear that this book is *also* a type or a picture of the church's conquest, not by a physical sword, but this time by the sword of the Spirit – the Word of God. Now, the principles we will be looking at apply to both physical as well as invisible battles. But it is the latter battles that I want to focus on. This book gives fantastic principles for taking cities for King Jesus.

For example, there was a good reason why the cities housing libraries were burned, and many others were not. Did you ever wonder about that? Why were some cities burned and others were not? It was primarily the library cities that were burned. God did not want Israel being sucked into humanistic thinking through the literature of Canaan. When you conquer a nation, that nation has the potential of undermining your whole culture. Many Christians bristle or are embarrassed when they are accused of being censors or book burners. Well, I am happy to be a book burner. Pornography should be censored, and when found it should be burned. The occult should be censored, and all of their books should be burned. Academics hate the idea of losing *any* information. For them, all information is sacrosanct. But there is some information this world needs to be rid of. In Acts 19:19 those who were converted to Christianity out of the occult burned their books (in part) to prevent others from being influenced. It says that the value of the books was 50,000 pieces of silver. The drachma piece of silver was 67.5 grains of silver, so using this past Tuesday's silver spot price, that amounted to burning \$149,500 worth of books. And people might think, "What a waste! why not sell those books so as to fund the church and other ministries? That's a huge amount of money to go up in flames." But it was worth it to God. God hates the occult, and He burned books in Acts just like He burned all of Canaan's library cities that mixed pornography, occult, false religious ideas, and other evils. There is more than one archeologist who wishes God hadn't burned those cities. But I for one am glad. I felt polluted back in College days when I dipped into the few books from Canaan that survived. God has His purposes, and this book of Joshua needs to be carefully studied if we are to develop a Christian nation. That's the one issue I have with Torba and Isker's book on Christian Nationalism. I really enjoyed most of it, but towards the end they said along with the Bible, they want Christians to thoroughly understand the Greek classics and Greek philosophy. And I say "No." Daniel anticipates a day when the dust of those civilizations will be blown away and not remembered. We shouldn't be unburying what God has buried.

But the book of Joshua also deals with a lot of other practical issues - like planning, strategy, triage, etc. We aren't going to be looking at those today. Instead, I want to demonstrate how even the battles that Joshua fought were always won or lost based on the unseen realities found in the the spirit-world of angels and demons. Demons and angels know the strategic importance of cities and they battle over cities.

III. Ten spiritual precursors to victory

But let's dive into the passage and look at ten spiritual precursors to victory. What needs to be in place? And when I speak of victory, I am speaking of cultural victory as well as personal victory. Some of these precursors are missing from the church of Jesus Christ, and it is no wonder to me that God has not blessed the church with cultural victory and why individuals are not finding individual victory. These are ten essentials.

A. God guides those who are already moving into His will (v. 13a).

Verse 13 starts off where we spend most of our time - dealing with the visible; sizing up the work load, and diving into that workload. This is not an impractical book that ignores the visible. It does not. Verse 13 begins with the simple statement, "And it came to pass, when

Joshua was by Jericho.” But don’t move on too quickly from that phrase. We need to ask some questions:

Why was he so close to the city? Well, God wanted him to conquer the city. Matthew Henry points out that he may have been at a loss as to how he would be able to conquer the city, but he did what he could. He was casing out the city. Elsewhere in the book we know that Joshua was accustomed to casing out the cities he was going after. No doubt he was counting the number of ladders he would need to scale the walls, or because these walls were impregnable he may have been wondering if God was going to have to starve the Canaanites out of the city, or perhaps he was looking for weak points that he could take advantage of. He knows God has commanded him to take the city, so he is casing it out. And there is nothing wrong with that. This kind of reconnoitering was commanded by God throughout the book. God never depreciates the use of wisdom, strategy, counting the cost, financial statements, demographics, etc. If you think that conquering Canaan was easy and took very little effort, then you haven’t read the book of Joshua. They didn’t just pray about it and have the problems go away. There was hard, hard work and planning involved.

And I think that it is significant that God gives Joshua His guidance in chapter 6 after Joshua began doing what he could. The first principle is that God guides those who are already moving. Years ago someone told me the wise saying that a ship cannot be steered unless it is moving. He said that you can move that rudder all you want and it is not going to go anywhere if the ship is stationary. When God gives partial guidance we need to take partial steps, and many times clearer direction comes as we begin to take the first steps that we know we need to take. When I was 23 years old God laid on my heart a deep burden and a clear call to have a little part to play in bringing Reformation to family, church, and culture. I didn’t know how that would transpire, but I started taking the steps that God would open up, and God would then open other doors. I still don’t know how I will be able to accomplish everything that God has laid upon my heart, but I know the duties that I have for this week, and I do them. I know the duties that I have for next year, and I do them.

The point is that it is not Biblical to wait until every “t” is crossed or every “i” is dotted before we start to do anything. God typically opens doors as we are walking; He typically answers those who knock and gives to those who are seeking. God has been leading many of you as well. Even though there is much that you do not know, I want to encourage you to remember that ships are steered when they are moving.

Gary and I believe that our theme for next year is service - service inside and outside the church. Service to family and service to culture. Imitating Christ, who was called “the Servant of the Lord.” Evangelist Michael unwittingly gave a nice introduction to that in last week’s sermon. But whatever your call to service might be, it will likely involve some reconnoitering (or puzzling through things) like Joshua did. It may involve positioning yourself before the walls of your part of the city. But you can trust that God does not make orders that He does not also pay for. So the first precursor to victory is start taking steps into God’s call upon your life.

B. God's guidance is sometimes sudden after a time of waiting. Be available and have faith that God can lead us, call us, and direct us; be flexible (v. 13b with 6:1ff).

But second, God's guidance is sometimes sudden - out of the blue, after a time of waiting. And we need to be ready for that. Verse 13 says, "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand." The Hebrew suggests that this was a sudden appearance. We are going to be seeing shortly that this Man was no ordinary man. This was God the Son in a preincarnate Theophany. What's a Theophany? Well, a Theophany was a temporary visible appearance of God in some physical form. Some of the theophanies of God that had already been made to God's people were God's appearance to Abraham in the form of a man, His appearance to Moses in the form of a fire in a burning bush, His appearance to Israel in the previous forty years in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. Sometimes God showed himself in the appearance of an angel. For example, Nebuchadnezzar saw what looked like a Man walking with Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, though he wasn't exactly like a man since he said that he looked like the Son of God. There was something different about Him.

Well, the same was true here. Let me just give you three clear hints in the context that this was no ordinary Man, or even an ordinary angel. This was a Theophany - an appearance of God the Son in human appearance.

First, look at Joshua's reaction in the second sentence of verse 14: "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped..." Notice that this Being not only accepts the worship, but insists in verse 15 that Joshua go further and take off his shoes in His presence. That is inconsistent with any angelic being, since in Scripture they always refused worship, and even picked people off their knees to keep them from even bowing before them. Only God receives worship. That's the first hint.

Second, verse 15 shows that the presence of this Person makes the very ground holy. This Being who appeared out of nowhere and yet looked like a Man says, "'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.'" No angel has the power to make the ground where he is standing holy. God does. God said the same thing to Moses when He talked out of the burning bush.

Third, in chapter 6:2 we have a very explicit statement. This Being continues to speak and Moses comments that it is Yehowah who is speaking. Verse 2 of chapter 6 says, "And the LORD [that's all capital letters, meaning it is Yehowah (or some pronounce it Jehovah - and others pronounce it Yawheh: "and the LORD")] said to Joshua..."

Those are three hints that we have a sudden appearing of the Lord in a theophany. We don't have time to look at it, but if you examine the various theophanies and correlate them to the New Testament you come to the conclusion that they were manifestations of the preincarnate Son of God. The one who commands the angelic hosts here, is the one who said in Matthew 26:53 that with a word He could have had more than twelve legions of angels at His command. Jesus continues to command angels in the service of the church.

He does so in chapter 6, but in this case, He also gave guidance to Joshua. Sometimes we pray for a long time for guidance, and we continue to faithfully serve the Lord with the knowledge that we have without receiving any further guidance. And then, suddenly, out of the blue the Lord gives us an assurance, or confidence, or even more explicit direction of what our next steps should be. We need to have faith that God can do this. And we need to be ready and available.

C. God must lead the battle; we must submit to His leadership (v. 13c; 15a).

But there is another thing that I see in these verses. I want you to notice something very encouraging about this Person. He has His sword drawn. It's not sheathed. It is drawn and ready for battle. Well, this means that God Himself is ready for battle. God draws His sword before we draw our swords because God *leads* the battle. He is the initiator. So the third precursor for victory is submitting to God's leadership.

Forty years before this, the people charged into battle when God had already told them *not* to go into battle, and they were resoundingly defeated. In chapter 7 of Joshua they do so again, and they were again defeated. We must follow God's leading. That is the only safe thing to do, even if He is leading you against a much smaller challenge than Jericho.

Pray for the pastors of the CPC. God has led some of them to take on Jerichos of their own. God has burdened Pastor Steven Morris' heart with not only a Reformation of the church as a whole, but to take on a brand new community in a state that seems as impossible as Canaan. And as they have been taking steps of faith, God is doing some remarkable things there. Ray Simmons is taking on a huge Jericho in his country. Pray that all the CPC churches would be more and more characterized by these ten precursors to victory.

D. We wrestle not against flesh and blood (v. 13c; 15a).

Fourth, there is more to it than just God's leading in battle. Joshua 6 says that Israel was marching around these walls for seven days, with nothing visibly happening. Yet here it is clear that God already had already drawn His sword for battle on day 1. Why is His sword in use before any physical battles began? Because there is far more to victory than the walls and people that can be seen. Whether we are talking about Washington DC or the Omaha city council, whether we are talking about liberal churches or conservative churches, there are demonic forces that we must contend with if we are to have the victory. There was already war in the heavenlies and He had His sword drawn because verses 14 and 15 call Him the Commander of the LORD's army, or literally, the LORD's host. This is a reference to the huge angelic army that had already been preparing the way for their physical battles.

This had been true years before. Psalm 78:49 says that God used angels to bring many of the plagues on Egypt. Back then He was preparing the way for an Exodus. And here His withdrawn sword was an indication that the Lord's army was already in battle with the demonic hordes. We must never forget that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers of evil. We will never gain the victory if we do not take the spiritual weapons of Ephesians 6 into account.

E. We must be ready when God is ready; there must be instant obedience (v. 13c with 6:1ff).

But the fifth point is that when *God* is ready, *we* need to be ready. Joshua made sure that this was the case with the Israelites. The moment the LORD told him His plan about marching around the walls of Jericho, Joshua gathered the people *and they marched the same day*. We will see that next week in chapter 6. There was immediate action. How ready are you for God's leading? Sometimes God waits to lead us until we are prepared. Are we prepared for His leading? How ready are you to move at a moment's notice if need be? One of the spiritual precursors to victory is readiness to do what God requires. We need to have an attitude of availability. We must not be so tied down with the riches and cares of this life that we can't move at a moment's notice if God called us to. Availability is an absolutely essential precursor to victory.

F. We must have a passion for God's kingdom and God's glory (v. 13d-14a).

Sixth, we must have a passion for God's kingdom and God's glory. In verse 13 it says, "And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, 'Are you for us or for our adversaries?'" Joshua *mistakenly* asked that question without realizing that he was talking to God, but we many times *deliberately* ask that question of God. We ask God if He is for our plans. Isn't that true? We come up with the plans, the agendas and the kingdom work that needs to be done and then hope that God will bless what *we* have decided to do. The focus is not on what *God* wants in the situation, but whether people agree with *us*, support *our* cause or give *us* grief. Of course, we can justify our desires from the Scripture, but it is still we who are making the decisions. Now, it is true that Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" But in context the "us" are those who are sold out to God's cause - and let me prove that by summarizing the context. The "us" are those who are putting to death the deeds of the flesh (v. 13), who are willing to suffer with Christ (v. 17), who are driven by God's hope (v. 20), who eagerly wait for God's transformation of all things (verses 19-25), who pray with groanings in the Spirit for God's will to be done (v. 26), who are led by God's will (v. 27), who are being conformed to the image of God's Son (v. 29). In other words, when we have a passion for God's kingdom, then we have the precursor for God to give us the victory.

I want you to notice that God completely reverses the focus of Joshua's question. He does so first by contradicting Joshua in verse 14 with a "No." Joshua didn't ask for a "Yes" or a "No" answer. He asked God to pick sides. And God says, "No. That's the wrong question. The question is not whether I am for you. The question is whether you are for Me."

And I would apply this in the same way to you. Is your decision making based on whether *you* are comfortable, whether it serves *your* needs, or is it whether this is really what *God* wants, and what *God's* kingdom needs. God says, "I am the commander around here, and I have come here not to serve your needs, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come. Are you willing to submit to My command and to my agendas?" And because

Joshua's heart is right, he falls down and worships. He wants *God's* glory to be lifted up; *God's* kingdom to be built; and *God's* commands to be followed.

Of course, this is not a one-time decision in your life. Jesus said that this needs to be a daily decision to pick up your cross and to follow Christ. In the future we will see that this focus was present in the conquering of Jericho, but it was missing in the attack on Ai in chapter 7, and you know what happened there, right? Over-confident-Israel in chapter 7 thought they could take on the small town with a much smaller contingent. Their focus was on *themselves*, and what *they* could accomplish and what *they* wanted. So this passage gives as one of the precursors to victory that we must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness - and the result Jesus said is that all of these things will be added.

G. Those who are given to worship find God's blessing (v. 14b).

Another precursor to victory is worship. Now, that may seem like a strange one, but bear me for a bit. Verse 14 goes on to say, "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped." We already looked at that as a proof that this Being was God, but it is also a precursor to victory because the worship of God so glorifies God and so humbles us that demonic hosts are routed. They are routed because James says that God gives more grace to the humble. Demons shudder at true worship. They don't mind sentimental man-centered worship. You trace the place of worship and especially singing through the Old and New Testaments and you will find that worship is a powerful tool of victory when it is approached rightly. It prepares our hearts to be right. But as a few sermons in the book of Revelation showed, Spirit led singing and worship is a part of overcoming the enemy and enthroning God on our praises. If you are needing victory against your own personal demons and strongholds, spend time worshiping God in Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, adoration, prayer, and meditation.

H. Those who are committed to prayer find God's answers (v. 14c).

The next precursor to victory is seen in verse 14. Joshua asks, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" He is asking for guidance. He was immediately brought to an attitude of seeking God's face in prayer. And God answers in chapter 6.

In my sermon on Revelation 8 (some years ago) I showed how prayer unleashes angelic regiments to fight God's battles. But, angels must wait till the church prays. They are itching for battle. They have their swords unsheathed. They have trumpets ready to sound the battle cry. But Revelation 8 says that there is silence in heaven until the prayers of the saints ascend (mixed with the prayers of Jesus), and *then* lightnings, thunderings, and earthquakes begin to happen, and angelic army after army is summoned by the trumpets into battle. The point of that chapter is that God has ordained for angelic battles to be synchronized with the church's prayers. Daniel chapter 10 does much the same.

This is why prayer-walking your neighborhood invites an angelic presence to be at work in that neighborhood. This is why church prayer unleashes invisible forces to be at work on behalf of our church. This is why Gary and I harp and harp on the importance of public prayer meetings. Don't be surprised that when the prayer meeting attendance dwindles, so too does the church's success. We have official prayer meetings at Monday noon and

Wednesday evenings. And you can join those two by Zoom if you are distant. Once a month (that was yesterday) we have it against the abortion mill, though there is a smaller team that goes there more regularly. For those who have the guts to engage in hard core imprecatory prayer that calls down God's curses on the high things that have exalted themselves against the knowledge of God, contact me. But prayer is a powerful precursor to victory.

Exodus 17 gives a fascinating picture of the power of prayer as Moses held up his hands. Let me read it for you. I'll begin with verse 8.

Ex. 17:8 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. 9 And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." 10 So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. 13 So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

That is such a great image of the power of prayer.

I. Those who have servant's hearts (humility) find God's blessing (v. 14d).

But for our next point I want to look at the character of this prayer in verse 14. I believe it shows a servant's heart. Joshua asks, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" He not only calls himself a servant, but he talks like a servant: "What does my Lord say to His servant?" I want to do whatever You want me to do. Most evangelical prayers do not sound like servant prayers; they sound like "give me" prayers. One of the reasons Joshua was so successful in his ventures is that he truly had a servant's heart, and when he asked for things, it was always for God's glory. The first verse of this book describes Moses as an ordinary servant of the Lord using the Hebrew word *eved*. But it describes Joshua being Moses' servant. The Hebrew word for Joshua's servanthood is *sharat* - a menial servant. Joshua was a servant's servant, and he delighted in that role. Christ said that those who are servants of all are qualified to be leaders of all. God delights in giving victory to those who pray with servant's hearts. Do you have that condition required for victory? If not, then ask God to give you the grace of being servant-hearted. It will be a part of the theme of service for next year.

J. Those who have a heart for holiness discover God's pleasure and His blessing (v. 15b).

But I'm going to end with one more precursor. It's point number 10. The final pre-requisite that God reminds Joshua of is holiness. We have a hard time fathoming how holy God is and how much he despises sin. But God tried to get across this point in verse 15.

Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

One of the recurring themes that we see in the book of Joshua was that there was victory as people obeyed the Lord, and there was defeat when they did not obey the Lord. We must not only seek daily cleansing in the blood of Christ, but we must pursue after holiness; we must hunger for holiness. Turn to chapter 7:10-13 to see how ineffective our prayers are when we fail on this point. I'll begin reading in chapter 7:10.

So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? [He is basically saying, "Get up and stop praying. This is not the time for prayer. This is the time for repentance. Why? He goes on.] Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. Get up, sanctify the people, and say, "Sanctify yourselves tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."

Can you see why the church in America has had so little impact in stopping abortion, pornography and other evils? God refuses to fight on behalf of a disobedient church. So-called born again believers number in the millions, yet we have no impact because we are carnal. A carnal Christianity will never reclaim America. And if there are sins like gluttony, pornography, gossip, slander, etc that God has been prodding you to confess and give up, and you have ignored His proddings, then you will not have personal victory either.

As we prepare for the future, one of the temptations is going to be to depend upon our own strength. But while there must be planning and work, the keys to victory lie in spiritual preparation by the power of a Sovereign God. I think Major Iain Thomas said it so well. Let me read from my notes taken from one of his lectures. He said,

What do we attempt to do? We put forth herculean efforts, thinking of this method and that which will attract people to our churches. We plan exciting advertizing and give away prizes. We spend vast sums of money to bring people under the sound of the gospel. And when it is all over, we retire from the fight - weary, baffled, disappointed, and perplexed. What can we do? We have put forth every effort under the sun. We have placarded our cities with advertizements and launched great campaigns. But, apart from a few here and a few there, the results are tragically lacking. In this generation Satan seems to be capturing millions for himself in comparison with the hundreds that come to Jesus Christ.....

God forgive us that we are attempting today to fight spiritual enemies by carnal means. It cannot be done. May He forgive us when we seem to think that by planning, publicity, advertizing, campaigning and working we will attain

something, whereas, in point of fact, we achieve nothing. Have we not understood that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal?¹

Joshua conquered Canaan, not because he had superior numbers, weapons, or chariots. He did not. He conquered Canaan because God had called him, he was obedient to the call, and his heart and the hearts of that whole generation of Israelites were prepared in these ten areas. Let me list them for you one more time:

1. They were already moving in the direction of God's call, and God guides those who are moving. Or to use another imagery, He invests further in those who are already using His investments well.
2. Second, they were not overwhelmed with sudden guidance. They were available and ready for the Lord to give them new direction. They were flexible. They were open.
3. Third, Joshua let God take the lead and he followed. This was not about God following Joshua and blessing Joshua's plans. He was captive to God's will.
4. Fourth, Joshua took seriously the presence of spiritual warfare in the heavenlies. Until we battle against the principalities and powers that hold our county, state, and nation in bondage and blindness, we will not have success in making them Christian.
5. Fifth, they were ready to move out when God was ready for them to move out. Instant obedience to God's direction ensures that God is willing to guide us further.
6. Sixth, Joshua had a passion for God's kingdom and God's glory rather than his own.
7. Seventh, Joshua worshipped God. He was passionate about God. And he taught Israel to worship.
8. Eighth, Joshua prayed, and he taught Israel to pray. He knew that His help was in the Lord.
9. Ninth, Joshua had a servant's heart and he taught Israel to have a servant's heart.
10. And tenth, Joshua responded promptly to God's call for holiness. It didn't make him perfect, but his hunger was to be holy as God was holy. And in later chapters he taught Israel this imperative of holiness.

Ask God to make us all prepared to take the conquest of our own personal Jerichos as well as our cultural Jerichos in His strength and in His way. Amen.

¹ Major Ian Thomas, on "Victorious Christian Living," from personal notes.