

## **Sermon Text (Joshua 5:13–6:5 ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” <sup>14</sup> And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” <sup>15</sup> And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

<sup>6:1</sup> Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. <sup>3</sup> You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. <sup>4</sup> Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. <sup>5</sup> And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.”

## **Jesus Has Accomplished the Impossible for You**

The people of Israel had finally entered the promised land by crossing the Jordan River on dry ground, the river having stopped flowing when the priests stepped into the river with the ark of the covenant. This was another miracle that God performed in the presence of his people. Some other miracles that God performed in their presence included leading them through the Red Sea on dry ground, providing them with water in several miraculous ways, feeding them with manna and quail, and giving them the victory over two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. And now, they were about to witness yet another miracle as their conquest of the land of Canaan began.

The first city on their list was Jericho, a city that seemed to have an impregnable wall. Despite this, the people of Jericho were afraid of Israel. As Rahab said to the spies who were sent into Jericho ahead of time, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom

you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Joshua 2:9–11). The spies reported this to Joshua, saying, “Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us” (Joshua 2:24). We also hear God repeat this to Joshua one last time in our reading for today before they took Jericho, saying, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor” (Joshua 6:2).

The walls of the city may have looked impossible to overcome, but the people of Israel had God’s promise that the city was theirs. And now, God was about to reveal to Joshua how they were to achieve this victory. Was it going to be through a military victory, like how Israel defeated the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og? No. God said to Joshua, “You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him” (Joshua 6:3–5).

Now, I’m no military expert, but if I were to bring down the walls of a seemingly impregnable city, I don’t think that’s how I would do it. In fact, if I were among the people of Israel when I heard this plan, I would probably have some questions, maybe even some doubts. And it probably wouldn’t be surprising to us if the people of Israel did doubt God. After all, despite witnessing so many other miracles, the people of Israel kept doubting God over and over again. Yet, this time, there doesn’t appear to have been any doubt. The rest of this account goes on to say

that the people of Israel did exactly as they were told, seemingly without question. We also hear the writer of the letter to the Hebrews say, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days” (Hebrews 11:30). Therefore, despite the seemingly pointless actions that they were being asked to do, the people of Israel put their faith in God, and everything happened exactly as God said that it would. As the account of the Fall of Jericho goes on to say, “As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city” (Joshua 6:20).

Like the people of Israel, there is an impregnable wall that each of us has to face. However, this is not a physical wall that we can travel to and see with our own eyes. This is a spiritual wall, a wall that is between us and the city of heaven. This wall was not built by God to keep us out. This wall was built by us. It is a wall that is made of our sins. Just one sin would be enough to build an impregnable wall that kept us out of heaven, but we keep sinning every single day, making that wall appear more and more impossible to bring down. It is for this reason that we can easily fall into despair. But why? Does God the Father not promise that everyone who believes in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, has the forgiveness of sins? Well, we can look at the sheer number of sins that we have committed throughout our lives and think that there is no way that God can forgive all of them, or, while we may think that God will forgive most of our sins, we may also think that there are one or two sins that are so bad that God couldn't possibly forgive us for committing them.

What is the cause of these doubts that can arise in us? It is that we are no longer focusing on God and what he can do. We are focusing on ourselves and what we have done. Even if we aren't thinking that we have to do something good enough to tear down the wall of our sins so that

we can get into heaven, we can still think that we have done something bad enough that nothing that God does can do anything about it. In those instances, we are doubting God and his power to forgive.

Now, it is true that we have all committed sins that seem impossible to forgive, but God has accomplished the impossible. He accomplished it by sending Jesus to do what no one else could do. Jesus lived a perfect life, meaning that there was no wall between him and heaven. And then, he faced the punishment that we rightfully deserved for the walls of sin that we have built. He hung on the cross and died as someone who had no place in heaven, even though he was the only one who had a place in heaven, and, in doing so, he knocked down every single one of your impregnable walls of sin that keep you out of heaven, something that none of you or anyone else was able to do. How do you know that Jesus succeeded in this? Because Jesus rose from the dead. By Jesus' resurrection, his victory, and ours, was declared.

The way that I had previously spoken might have made it sound as though the wall of sin that you had built was still there and was something that you would one day have to deal with, but, in reality, that wall of sin is already gone. It might seem like it still standing strong when you feel the guilt for all of the sins that make up that wall, but Jesus completely took it down years ago when he said the words, "It is finished" (John 19:30), from the cross and confirmed that he took it down with his resurrection from the dead. There is nothing else that needs to be done, no stone that still needs to be knocked over, because the stone that sealed Jesus' tomb has been rolled away. All you need is faith, faith that the Holy Spirit freely provides for you through the preaching of the Word and through the waters of Holy Baptism. This is not a faith that is built on shaky ground, that crumbles when something seemingly impossible gets in the way. It is a faith that is built on the solid foundation of Jesus and trusts that he has already accomplished the impossible for you.

Therefore, just as the people of Israel had faith that God has already delivered the city of Jericho into their hands and would therefore bring down the impregnable walls of Jericho, so we have faith that Jesus has already brought down the impregnable walls of our sin and cleared the way into the city of heaven for us, and we continue to walk in that faith as Jesus leads us safely into that city of heaven.