

Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 6

Jericho

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who seeks to accuse or curse us; how often He, in grace, associates us in the combat against the powers of darkness in the heavenly places; how often, too, He reveals Himself to us as He did to David, with His drawn sword turned against the city of God; that is to say, as the One who, for His own, is a consuming fire, who chastens and humbles them, but in order afterwards to replace His sword in its sheath, and in the end restore them.

Even that is consoling, in spite of all; but it is a terrible thing for a man to be met, like Balaam, by the angel with the drawn sword, because, for a reward, he was selling the gift he had received from God to the devil, the accuser of the brethren. Such a path is that of a reprobate who does not know God, but how many Christians, alas! in these days of ruin, associate themselves in some manner with the way of Balaam; how many in company with the enemy of the people of God, though clad in the prophet's dress, place themselves in the hands of the world to do the enemy's work.

"And Joshua went unto him and said unto him: Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" It is impossible to be neutral in the fight, and we ought all, like Joshua, to understand this. "And the Captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." He who reveals Himself to Joshua as Lord of hosts claims also His character of holiness. It is impossible for those who are called to fight under a divine leader to remain associated, individually or corporately, with evil or defilement in the walk. It was partly on account of having disregarded this principle that the people were defeated before Ai. To keep unjudged evil in the heart exposes us to the judgment of God and renders us defenceless in the hands of the enemy; it is the same thing with evil in the assembly. If God is holy in redemption, as He showed Himself to be to Moses in the bush (Ex. 3: 5) — and where did He make a more brilliant display of His holiness? — let us remember that He is not less holy in the combat, and that we can only engage in it after having loosened the shoes off our feet.

Joshua 6

JERICHO

The people arrive at length in presence of the terrible obstacle raised to prevent their taking possession of Canaan. There is nothing the enemy hates more than seeing us in the enjoyment of our privileges, and taking a heavenly position. He is well aware that a heavenly people can escape from his hands and steal his goods; therefore his chief endeavour is to set some obstacle in the way of our onward progress.

This occurs in the history of every Christian, not necessarily at the moment of conversion, but sooner or later when it is a question of entering the path of conflict for the realisation of our heavenly calling.

The first impediment put in our way by Satan is an apparently impregnable fortress, which it is impossible to enter or to quit: "None went out and none came in." (v. 1) Surely this is enough to terrify us, and to make us turn back; and this is precisely the aim of the adversary, in which, alas, he too often succeeds. Every Christian has to face at some time or other his stronghold of Jericho. I need not enumerate here the difficulties of each soul, they are diverse, but may be resumed in one word, an obstacle. If I set my face heavenwards, what will happen? I shall lose my position; I shall be cut short in my career; my friends will forsake me; my parents will never suffer it; I should have to give up all I love, and separate myself from the Christians amongst whom I received such blessing.

Such is often the aspect which the high walls of Jericho assume before the affrighted soul. Ah! how many Christians lose courage before the fight, and turn back.

But the soul, prepared by God, does not retreat in view of difficulties. It knows it is in possession of a means of overcoming them, and makes use of it. It is a very simple, but unique, way, for there is no other: it is faith. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after that they were compassed about seven days." (Heb. 11: 30) Faith is simple confidence in Another, in the Lord, and at the same time complete absence of self-confidence, for these two things are inseparable. The obstacle yields to faith. What does it matter if the walls reach up to heaven? What are they for faith? Faith counts on the power of God, and this, dear friends, is the first great characteristic of faith. "In order," says the apostle, "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2: 5) A power absolutely divine is necessary in the fight, and can alone overthrow the obstacle, and it is solely on this power that faith rests.

We may notice, too, when faith has been appealed to, how jealous this power is of the existence of anything which could wear the appearance of human wisdom. The Captain of the Lord's host, who talks with Joshua, does not give them the choice of arms or means of warfare. They are not to make any plan or arrangement; they are not to concert as to the means for gaining the victory; God Himself has ordered everything, and faith submits to the order established by God, uses the means which He points out, and does not invent others. We must have societies, committees, conferences, money, etc., etc., is often said. Man must have them, but faith needs nothing of the kind. God has His own means.

But, it may be said, why not simplify the path? Why all these complications? Why go round the city every day, and seven times the seventh day? Why this procession with the ark and trumpets? Faith does not ask why? It does not reason as to the means God chooses to employ; it accepts them, enters into them, and obtains the victory instead of being beaten by the enemy. It was thus at the Passover and at the Red Sea. Do you say: Then faith is without intelligence? Not at all; it first submits and then understands. Faith will tell you the reason of the seven days, the ark, the procession, the trumpets, and the shouts of joy, but it will only tell you after submission to them, otherwise it would be intelligence and not faith.

But this is not all. Faith marches forward in dependence on God, who says: "I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." Then it is put to the test. There must be patience; the people had to march thus during six days, and then patience must have her perfect work: "The seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times."

There are yet other blessed characteristics of this precious faith which we may do well to notice. It associates us with Christ, gives us part and communion with Him. God marshals His people round the ark in the conflict. It was no longer, as at Jordan, the ark preceding the people, but here the armed men go before the ark with the priests, and the reward comes after.

But the aim and result of association with Christ is never to exalt or attach importance to man; it exalts Christ and makes much of Him. The ark itself formed the body of the army, properly speaking, the indispensable centre, the main force; and the whole attitude of the people around it, manifestly proclaimed it. Without the ark there could be neither warfare nor victory.

Faith always renders testimony to Christ: "The seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the Lord, and blew with the trumpets." It was a perfect testimony to the power of the ark in presence of the enemy.

Faith is zealous to exalt and render testimony to Christ, zealous for that service which is also conflict. "Joshua rose early in the morning." (v. 12) "They rose early about the dawning of the day." (v. 15) See how zeal in one provokes and encourages it in others; but we shall come to this again. In short we see that it is God alone who obtains the victory, though at the same time associating us with Christ in it. Of what use would weapons of warfare have been against Jericho? None whatever, God does

it all. He desires that the power and victory should come entirely from Him, and be without any mixture of human importance.

Generally when it is a question of fighting, Christians are ready to admit that the power is of God, but they do not consent to the absolute exclusion of self, and the consequence is that they are not rewarded by a complete victory as at Jericho, where God claimed this honour for Himself; not that He refused human instrumentality, but it must be He who makes use of it, so that man may not be exalted in his own eyes. We do well to note God's way of action. He chooses instruments without strength or value in themselves, or else, if they are worth something in the eyes of men, He begins by smashing them as He did with Saul of Tarsus; then He says: "He is a chosen vessel unto me." Now I can use you.

We have already noticed that the manner of action of Christians during conflict is too often exactly the opposite to that of God. They put their means and resources in the foreground. "We have formed an excellent plan; we are well organised; we have a superior staff of evangelists, and we send forth our emissaries into the four quarters of the globe." Dear friends, I am not inventing; every day one hears and reads such things; you and I have perhaps expressed ourselves in these terms before now. If we look at man's work we shall always see this deplorable mistake.

Had Israel said: Very well, let the power be God's, but let us combine to find the means wherewith to overthrow the walls of Jericho; what would have happened on the seventh day? Not a single stone of the wall would have fallen!

But here the power of the enemy gives way, and the people destroy the accursed city. More than this, their faith and activity in testimony and victory set other souls at liberty, as will always be the result when we engage in the Lord's battles. Rahab, still a prisoner, is delivered, and brought into the midst of God's people, where she can henceforth enjoy the same privileges as the victors.

One more detail I would call your attention to. Faith makes no compromise with the world, receives and takes nothing from it. God forbids the people to touch the spoil of Jericho; it is accursed. Jehovah can claim these things and glorify Himself by them; they belong to Him, but not to the children of Israel, who can only touch them to put them into "the treasury of the house of the Lord."

Such is the fight of faith. May God give us to go over these things in our hearts, so as not to be vanquished in our contest with the enemy.