

Overcoming Trouble – Joshua 10:1-15
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

“In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33b). Have you found these words of Jesus to his followers to be true this week? ***“In this world you will have trouble.”*** Have you accepted the implications of these words of Jesus, or are you still working hard to achieve a trouble-free life? ***“In this world you will have trouble.”*** When you wake up in the morning, are you still hoping that in answer to your prayers God will finally remove trouble from your life and give you the health, wealth and happiness you’ve been longing for? ***“In this world you will have trouble.”*** That’s a “troubling” statement, isn’t it (pun intended!)? And even though we’ve found this statement to be very true every day of our lives in this broken world, I suspect that in our hearts we each often hope, pray, expect and work tirelessly for a different reality. And we wonder why God is taking so long to answer our prayers and finally remove the troubles we’re facing and give us that powerful victory we’ve been longing for.

But what if? What if God’s victory in our lives in answer to our prayers isn’t always the removing of our troubles and challenges and pain, but rather the giving of the strength of soul we need to boldly face them with him and trust him to use them for good as he makes us more and more like Christ? What if we shifted our focus from always asking God to take our troubles away and fix our problems, to asking him to use them for good in our lives as he builds our faith, grows our character, shows us how the principles of his Word really work in real life; and as he draws us into deeper and deeper love relationship with him? What if we really believed and embraced the words of James from Scripture:

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

(James 1:2-4)

What if? What if our main goal and pursuit in life was not our comfort and enjoyment, but rather to know God fully and become mature and complete in Christ? And if we began to think: If troubles and battles and struggles further us along in that process, how can I grow through the ones I'm facing today? What if?

Well, today, in our study of Scripture, we're going to see how some great trouble from the world came quickly on a group of people who had just recently surrendered to the one true God and his purposes. But what they found is that as they called for help based on the promises of God, they experienced the blessings of his personal protection and power fighting on their behalf in the midst of their troubles. Did all their troubles go away? Did they stop having arguments with their spouses? Did they no longer have to diligently toil and work to earn a living for their families? Did all their sicknesses go away? Did they become healthy and wealthy? No. But what did happen? God gave them powerful victory over their enemies; he built their faith as they saw his awesome power in action; he showed them how faithful he is to keep his promises; and he gave them a beautiful picture of his steadfast love for those who have surrendered to him.

This group of people was the Gibeonites. If you'll remember from last week they had concocted and carried out a cunning plan to surrender to God and his people in the only way they thought possible: through trickery and deception. By tricking Joshua and the Israelites into making a covenant with them, they found a way to escape with their lives and avoid God's decree of judgment that was on the inhabitants of the Promised Land. While their methods for surrendering to God were wrong and they experienced serious consequences for them, still they had made the much wiser choice of surrendering to rather than fighting the one true God. And this is where we pick up the account today in Joshua chapter 10. Today we'll be studying chapter 10, verses 1 through 15.

II. A UNITED ATTACK AND A CALL FOR HELP (vs. 1 to 6)

Let's begin by reading verses 1 through 6, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *A United Attack and a Call for Help:*

As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon

had made peace with Israel and were among them, 2 he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors. 3 So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, 4 "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel." 5 Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it. 6 And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us."

We see here in these opening verses that the evidence of God's mighty power working on behalf of the Israelites was unmistakable and causing great fear throughout the land. No one was debating whether or not there really was a God or which god was the true God. Instead they were focused on preparing to do battle with him. Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem, which was about 8 miles to the southeast of Gibeon, had heard about the complete destruction of Ai and its king and was in great fear that he was about to suffer the same fate. Adding to his worry was the fact that his nearby neighbors from the great warrior city of Gibeon had already made peace with the Israelites rather than risk a fight, secretly defecting from the alliance of all the other kingdoms in the land against Israel. This was both deeply troubling and a source of great anger against Gibeon for their betrayal, causing Adoni-Zedek to call the other Amorite kings to join him in attacking Gibeon. Gathering their full forces they declared war on Gibeon and set-up camp outside its walls.

Gibeon was quickly discovering that aligning with the one true God is not popular with those who've rejected him and are focused on fighting him and whoever's with him. The Gibeonites now had a target on their back and had entered a battle of epic proportions. But in this battle, there was some good news. They were no longer alone with only human wisdom and strength as their assets. The living God was now on their side and ready to fight with them in the troubles of life!

As the full strength of the Amorite armies closed in, the Gibeonites sent a distress call to God and his people. Reminding the Israelites of the covenant they had just sworn to keep with the Gibeonites, they said: *Come quickly! Save us! Help us! All the hill-country Amorites are gathered against us!*

But would Joshua and the Israelites honor their covenant, sworn by the name of the Lord, and come to Gibeonites' aid? Or would they break the promise they had made and say: "Serves them right for the way they tricked us into this stupid covenant"?

III. A COVENANT KEPT IN THE POWER OF THE LORD (vs. 7 to 11)

Let's find out in verses 7 to 11, which I've labeled in your notes: *A Covenant Kept in the Power of the Lord:*

7 So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. 8 And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." 9 So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. 10 And the Lord threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. 11 And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword.

Right off in these verses we notice that Joshua and the Israelites know the right thing to do and get right to the business of doing it. Like their God, they know they must honor the covenants and promises they've made and come to the aid of their new allies and servants, the Gibeonites. Gathering the men of war, including all their best warriors, they march up to Gibeon by night, a journey of around 15 miles, ready to lay down their lives for people who so recently tricked and deceived them.

This is great evidence that God's at work in their lives, because this is not what people would ever choose to do apart from God. In fact, this sounds a lot like what God does for us, doesn't it? While we were still sinners he loved us so much that he was even willing to die for us (see Romans 5:8). And in surrendering to him through repentance and faith in Christ, we who were formerly his enemies get to experience his love, vigilant care and protection. In making peace with God and his people, the Gibeonites were now experiencing the persecution of the world, but also the benefits of God's personal protection and power.

And I love the picture here of how Joshua and Israelites are learning to walk in the ways of their God: keeping their promises and laying down their lives for their former enemies. They're also learning from their past mistakes and remaining connected with the Lord as they go, seeking and listening to his counsel. They're marching into battle and the troubles of this world, fully connected to God and his counsel. We're told that the Lord spoke to Joshua sometime before they arrived at Gibeon and reassured him that they would win this battle against the Amorites and in a big way. ***"Not a man of them shall stand before you,"*** God said. In other words, God had already given the Amorites into the Israelites' hands and victory was certain. Fear was banished as God's people trusted in his promises and marched forward in his counsel.

Well, after the 15-mile march through the night to Gibeon, the Israelites and the Gibeonites got to see an awesome display of the power of God fighting for his people as they moved forward into battle at his command. As they engaged the enemy, the Lord went to work on the Amorites' emotions and created a massive panic attack, causing them to run uphill in the opposite direction westward and then south back toward where they had come from. We're told that as they fled ***"Israel struck them with a great blow...and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah."*** SHOW POWERPOINT.

And to top it all off, those who had escaped the Israelites' swords were subjected to great hailstones the Lord himself caused to fall on them, so that more of them died from hailstones than from swords. When the Lord comes to the fight, you don't want to be on the opposing army! But wait, there's more...

IV. THE LORD FIGHTS FOR HIS PRAYING PEOPLE (vs. 12 to 15)

God, in fighting for his people, was about to respond to a bold prayer request from his servant Joshua that would bring about what Scripture calls, “*A Day Like No Other*” in human history, before or since. Let’s see what he did in verses 12 through 15, which I’ve labeled in your notes: *The Lord Fights for His Praying People*:

12 At that time Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

"Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." 13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.

Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. 14 There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord obeyed the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel. 15 So Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

Wow! Can you imagine make this prayer request of God out loud in front of other people and then expecting it to actually happen? That’s a prayer of great faith, isn’t it? A prayer made by a man who had seen firsthand God’s awesome power at work many times and who knew that nothing is too difficult for the living God. And wonder of wonders, God answered Joshua’s prayer, causing the sun to stand still and the moon to stop until the nation of Israel took vengeance on their enemies. This was a prayer prayed according to God’s will and answered with power by a sovereign God who is in control of all aspects of his creation. The time for judgment on the Amorites of the hill country had come and God extended the daylight until his judgment was complete.

How did God do this without causing complications on earth and in the universe and messing up the giant clockwork of stars and planets and even time itself? Well, the bottom line is this: the One who created all things and is holding all things together has absolutely no problem making adjustments, putting things on hold, stopping time itself, or doing whatever else he pleases in his universe. While

we can't even begin to comprehend all the unintended consequences and effects on the universe from such a miracle, God knows every single one and exactly how to deal with each of them.

In my mind I picture God putting all motion of the stars and planets and solar systems and sun and moons on hold. FREEZE. And he keeps it frozen while he lets the people finish out the battle with swords and the hailstones he's throwing down. When he's satisfied that the mission has been accomplished: UNFREEZE. Is that how it happened? I have absolutely no idea. But I do know without a doubt that it was no problem for our all-knowing, all-powerful God, however he chose to do it. He is completely sovereign over all aspects of his creation, including, as we've seen today, time, our emotions, the weather, and even the movement of the sun, moon, planets and stars. The One who created all things has complete control of all things and does as he pleases! And as he fights for his people and his purposes, nothing is too difficult for him or beyond the scope of his power.

This was truly a day like no other. God has never before or since performed a miracle exactly like this. ***The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.*** And even more profound, he performed this miracle at the request of a praying man; a man who prayed even while fully engaged in battle. Don't ever forget how important and powerful prayer is.

One quick informational note before we begin to think a little more about applications to our lives today. You probably noticed that reference to the Book of Jashar. Do you have that book in your Bibles? Well, most biblical scholars agree that the ancient Book of Jashar was not a part of the inspired Scriptures and was lost at some point in history. There are several modern books that claim to be translations of the original Book of Jashar, but these claims don't seem to be backed up by good evidence. The important point for us to remember today is that this miracle was documented and supported by another book outside of Scripture, more evidence that it really did happen.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Well, as we turn our attention now to what this means for us today, I want to first ask you: In our Joshua study for the past two weeks, would you say the Israelites have come face-to-face with some trouble in their lives? Last week, when things seemed to be going so well for the nation, they were deceived by a massive lie that led them into disobedience to a previous command of God. This week, back at camp in Gilgal, an urgent distress call was received calling them to risk their lives for people who had just lied to them. The promise they had just made based on a lie now required them as God's people to go to war against a huge force of Amorites gathered for battle.

Do you think Joshua ever thought, "What next? Can't we just have an ordinary, peaceful day when I can sit around and read a good book while I sip my tea and put my feet up? Why is there always some kind of problem I have to deal with every day?" Trouble just seemed to keep coming, didn't it? Much like it does in our lives. And the Gibeonites were experiencing the exact same reality. Having dealt with the problem of imminent destruction at the hand of the Israelites, they were now under attack by their former allies.

Trouble. Trouble. Trouble. We can't escape it on this earth. We can't escape it on this earth, but will have to wait for heaven for our trouble-free dreams to come to reality. Fortunately, God is gracious and does give us seasons of life and days from time to time when troubles are fewer and we can enjoy some times of rest and refreshment. But the overall reality of life is that the words of Jesus are profoundly true: ***"In this world you will have trouble."*** We can count on some trouble that is just "part and parcel" of the broken world we live in and the cumulative effects of sin throughout the ages. We can also count on lots of trouble coming from our own mistakes and sins. Additionally, we can count on intense trouble coming from the flaming arrows being shot at us by God's enemies. Like Israel and the Gibeonites, we also have a target on our backs as God's people.

The reality is that trouble comes in all shapes and sizes and calls us every time to choose how we'll respond to it. Will we let it drive us to despair and hopelessness and inaction and complaining? Will we let it tempt us to use worldly ways of dealing with it? Will we be endlessly bitter that things haven't worked out like we

hoped, or that we haven't achieved the American dream: the comfortable and problem-free life we dreamed of? Or will we engage with trouble in godly ways, calling on God for the strength of soul we need to meet it head on, responding to it in ways that glorify God, grow our character, and make us more like Christ?

What's your attitude toward the trouble you're facing in your life today? Are all your efforts focused on making it go away? Or are you keeping a heavenly perspective, remembering that God does have a purpose in it and will use it for good in your life as you call on him and diligently seek and trust his counsel? Are you remembering that we are strangers in this world? This is not our home. So we do we try to make it that way, endlessly disappointed that troubles keep coming our way?

Well, as we wrap up today, I want to offer you a few closing words of encouragement from what we've studied in Joshua this morning. First of all, similar to the experience of the Gibeonites, we can count on persecution and attacks from the enemy. Trouble will come from the enemy if we're truly living as followers of Christ. But in these troubles and attacks, we can confidently know that God will provide us with what we need to endure and come out victorious in the end as we call on him. He will fight the battle with us. God is a promise keeper and he is fully committed to caring for and protecting his people. And who else would you rather have fighting on your behalf than the God of the universe? If you're his child through Jesus Christ, the Lord fights for you continually as you call on him and your victory will ultimately come from his great power and not your own. You will need to fight alongside him and take difficult action based on his counsel, but you'll only win the battle as you rely on him.

Secondly, I'd like to challenge you to broaden your perspective on what victory looks like in your life. Victory does not necessarily mean the complete removal of the problems you're facing. Certainly there are times when God miraculously removes a problem from our lives and we experience a victory like Israel and the Gibeonites experienced over the Amorites. Praise God and give him all the glory when that happens. But consider this: an even more profound victory is displayed when God provides to us the peace that passes understanding and joy of the Lord and rock-solid faith as we endure the struggles and troubles of life with our eyes fixed on him...when he shows a hopeless world through us the enduring hope God gives to his people even in the hardest of times...when he

makes his people more and more like his Son, Jesus Christ, through the troubles of life. This is victory with eternal significance far beyond just the temporary removal of an earthly problem.

And finally, in the battles and troubles you face, let your focus be staying connected with the Lord at all times, breathing in and believing his Word and praying continually. Like Joshua, seek and follow the Lord's counsel and continue doing it even in the heat of battle. Meet your troubles by drawing nearer to the Lord and remaining there. And don't be afraid to ask God for big miracles. He's probably not going to stop the sun and moon again for you, but the full power of the sovereign God stands ready to powerfully answer prayers prayed according to his will. And as we've seen today, the power of God activated through the prayers of his people is unlimited. Let's call on him and do it continually.

Listen to what the Lord did for David when he called on the Lord. From Psalm 138, verse 3:

On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.

God didn't take away his troubles, but he increased the strength of his soul as he walked through them. David goes on to say in verses 7 and 8:

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever...

Through the troubles of life, the Lord fights for us and with us and will fulfill his purposes through them as we call on him and trust him for what we need.

You may have noticed today that in using that statement from Jesus, ***"In this world you will have trouble,"*** I left out some important things Jesus included with that statement when he said it. You see, Jesus didn't just make that statement without providing hope and direction on how to deal with that trouble. Let me read the full verse, found in John 16, verse 33. Jesus said:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jesus knew that his followers would encounter great trouble, as we all do. He wasn't promising to take away all their problems if they would just follow and trust him. But he was telling them that in the middle of those troubles they would inevitably face, they could find hope and peace in the midst of them. And that hope and peace would be found only in him, as they called on him and he came to fight on their behalf.

This world is not our home, my friends, and it will bring us trouble. Let us never forget that God's primary concern is not to remove all the trouble from our lives, but rather to come fight through the trouble with us as we call on him and walk in the counsel of his Word, giving us enduring joy and peace in the process and making us more and more like Christ. Let's meet the trouble head-on and trust God to do his work and bring us the ultimate victory!