**May 8, 2022 Matthew 6:25-34**

 ***Jericho Walls***

**Scripture: *Matthew 6:25-34 NRSV***

*(25)"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (26)Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (27)And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? (28)And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, (29)yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (30)But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? (31)Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' (32)For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.* ***(33)But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** *(34)"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

**Notes:**

1. ***Strive***for the kingdom of God…
	1. First thing, spend ***daily*** time in God’s Word.
	2. The second thing is ***daily*** prayer.
2. Pray and persevere in ***bold*** prayers.
	1. God is telling us not to be ***anxious*** in our prayers.
	2. Drop the walls that ***separate*** us from God;
	3. Pray with ***thanksgiving***.
	4. God will be ***with*** ***you***.
	5. God is in ***control*** and I am not.
	6. I relinquished control and ***trusted*** God.
3. ***Face*** the Walls of Jericho
	1. Israelites were ***praying*** as they circled the city.
	2. Have you ever faced a situation that seemed ***impossible***?
	3. After seven days of circling Jericho, ***God*** ***delivered*** on a 400 year promise.
4. ***Jesus*** ***asks***, “What do you want me to do for you?”
	1. God wants you to ***boldly*** ***go*** to Him with details.
	2. What do you want ***God*** to do?
	3. Define your ***Jericho***.
5. What is your ***Jericho*?**
	1. Jericho is spelled ***healing***; ***salvation***; ***reconciliation***; ***provision***; might be someone’s name.
	2. Seek ***God***, seek His ***kingdom***, and seek His ***righteousness***.

**Script:**

As a child I remember many times hearing a preacher telling a convincing story and making an appeal for me to give my life to Christ. Many times, I would respond and for a day or two, maybe even a couple of weeks, I would be different and live my life according to what I had learned. But many times I would stray away. I guess you could say that life distracted me from my commitment to God and that is why I strayed. As a child, I did not understand the importance of living my life for Christ. I knew I did not want to spend an eternity in Hell, and I wanted to spend eternity with Jesus, but I did not realize the difficulties I would encounter along the way.

Maybe you understand where I am coming from. Maybe you encountered lapses in your walk with Christ and perhaps you stumbled and fell from time to time. Maybe you wanted an easy life and thought that by walking with God life would be easier. Perhaps you came from a good Christian family and all you’ve ever known was that you attended church when the doors were opened and the rest of your life centered around church. But when faced with life’s complicated scenarios you realized that the life you had as a child is not as easy as it seemed back then.

Maybe, just by chance you may be sitting there thinking, “What in the world does this have to do with Jericho’s walls? Well today in our passage we will read a statement that helps us understand that when we take action by seeking God first and putting Him in the forefront of our lives, God’s promise. The promise that every single priority that falls underneath the priority of God will be taken care of like only God can do. What is your priority list? What things in your life are most important and take priority over everything else. For me it was God first and foremost, above everything else. Then came my marriage to Janice, my commitment to raise my children properly, and my commitment to family. After that was my commitment to the church, and then my job, and then other relationships. These are just examples, some of you may have similar priorities and yet others may have a completely different set of priorities. Let’s dive into the Word today Matthew 6:25-34 and see where it takes us and what it has to do with Jericho.

**Scripture**

***Matthew 6:25-34 NRSV***

*(25)"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (26)Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (27)And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? (28)And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, (29)yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (30)But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? (31)Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' (32)For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.* ***(33)But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** *(34)"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. Matthew 6:25-34 NRSV*

I want you to pay special attention to verse 33 today, “***(33)But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well***.” If you are going to seek God first, there are a couple of things that are not negotiable. The first thing is that we spend daily time in God’s Word. It is a book that I highly recommend. The whole idea is that in being in God’s Word, you allow God to speak to you through the words written on the pages and what you perceive as the message as you read it, how do these words directly apply to the situations or circumstances in your life. The second thing is daily prayer which we will look at more in depth. We are not only to read His word but also spend time with him talking to him and listening to what he has to say to you.

We are able to ***Pray and Persevere in Bold Prayers***. I especially like what Philippians 4 has to say, but take special notice of verses 6-7. “*(6)Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7)And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*”Philippians 4:6-7 *NRSV*

Listen closely and you will hear God is telling us not to be anxious in our prayers. Many of us are already in trouble, and I may just be included in this group. We are challenged to drop the walls that separate us from God; we are challenged to chill out, to relax, and to understand that we have got work to do. Oh and don’t miss that one word in there that many overlook, thanksgiving. That is right we are to do this with thanksgiving. It is not a fear and trepidation prayer. Thanksgiving helps us with our anxiety and helps us understand that God’s got this. That leads us to verse 7 which says, if we pray with thanksgiving, we will experience God’s peace. You might wonder, what is different about God’s peace? His peace is more than positive thinking, which is good, but God’s peace is more. It’s not the absence of conflict. Even with God’s peace, there can be conflict. It’s more than good feelings, good vibes, and warm fuzzies. We like those things, but God’s peace is different. It is the peace in knowing that God is in control. That’s a game changer and a life changer. God’s peace will empower you, encourage you, remind you, and challenge you to put first things first. Seek God first and He’ll be with you in all those priorities you place after Him and with that you will have peace. The kind of peace that says God knows what He’s doing. Even when I scratch my head and I don’t know what to do, I trust Him and I believe He knows best.

Years ago, I read a book named *The Circle Maker* by Mark Batterson. It’s an interesting book. It’s about praying circles around your biggest dreams and your greatest fears. I firmly believe in the power of prayer and have seen it modeled by many role models in my life. I watched many of my former pastors, Rev. Brown, Rev. Smith, and others who have pastored and prayed. Some would close their office door for hours on end to make time for prayer and time with God, taking the prayer requests of the church to the Lord. These things inspire me to strive for a better prayer and devotional time for myself, to face the challenges ahead by praying bold prayers and persevering in prayer no matter what. Have I prayed bold prayers before? Yes. Have I persevered in prayer? Sometimes, but not in the ways I would like and I’m probably not alone.

Right now, I am personally dealing with my human tendency to freak out and God reminding me that He is in control. How am I going to accomplish the tasks that lie before me? How am I going to pay for the expenses that lie ahead for me? How long should I try to hold on to something that has no eternal reward? I am getting to an age where a fixed income is a definite; how will Jan and I be able to maintain our style of living; will we be able to afford retirement at all. And then I am reminded; God is in control and I am not.

I remember when I felt the call of God in my life to enter into pastoral ministry. I remember all of the questions. I looked at my monthly expenses and my monthly income; and I remember wondering how the bills would get paid. I remember Jan asking what exactly this ministry was going to look, and I could not answer her with any clarity. In many ways God was writing my story and it was up to me to follow His lead in order to get the outcome that he wanted. I remember laying it on the altar in prayer and saying Lord I cannot do this without you, Please take it over, and do with me what you want.

I remember the week before my mother passed away; she was not feeling well at all. I believe she knew her cancer was back but she didn’t say much, I remember her calling Jan and asking medical questions. I remember feeling so helpless as she dealt with her pain and discomfort; and I remember coming to the church and kneeling at this altar and asking God to heal her; I could have asked for her to have many more years with us here in this world, but I chose God’s will over my own, knowing that the healing would most likely would mean that she would leave this world and go to be with the Lord. She went home to be with the Lord later that week. Bold prayers which bring God’s peace. I knew I was not in control. I struggled with all the human feelings of wanting to be a good son, worrying about my mom and the anxiety that I know I’m not supposed to have. You’ve been there. It crossed my mind that this was a great reminder of the power of prayer and how God works. I couldn’t control the situation, but I could go boldly to God. I didn’t know exactly how the answer to my prayers was going to turn out, but I could trust Him. I didn’t hear an audible voice, but I clearly heard God reminding me to chill and I experienced that peace that just understands. I relinquished control and trusted God.

**Face the Walls of Jericho**…. What does all of this have to do with the walls of Jericho? In the book *The Circle Maker*, the march around the Jericho walls is the backdrop of the book where God delivered on His 400-year promise. Some of you are like, really? 400 years? Is that how long it takes? No, not usually, so don’t be discouraged. The promise starts in Genesis 15 with Abraham and then is confirmed several times throughout the Old Testament. While the Jericho story in Joshua 6 doesn’t explicitly mention the Israelites taking the position of prayer, I have no doubt that the Israelites were praying as they circled the city. Isn’t that what we do when we face challenges beyond our abilities? Can you imagine that first glance of the skyline of Jericho? The Children of Israel had been wandering in the desert for 40 years and are now entering the Promised Land.

I wonder if they felt small. Remember when Moses sent out the twelve spies back in Numbers 12? They were supposed to scout out the Promised Land and come back with an evaluation. They came back with, what I call, the ultimate church vote. The church board voted ten to two not to advance. The two who said, “Yes, we can do this with God’s help,” were Joshua and Caleb. The other ten said, “We can’t do this. They’re going to squash us like grasshoppers. The people and cities are huge!” They pay the consequence. They wander for 40 years because of this vote. They now understand, as they see this walled city, why some of those spies might have freaked out. The lower wall was six feet high. That’s not too impressive. But, the upper wall was around 50 feet high and in this ancient metropolis, it would have seemed overwhelming. The Children of Israel looked at what God had promised and it seemed impossible. The way God told them to take the city seemed nonsensical.

Let’s get real about this. Have you ever been up against a situation or circumstance that seems overwhelming or impossible? You feel small. You feel like the grasshopper. It’s too big, too painful. You feel powerless and maybe, that it might just be the first thing that has ever been too hard for God. Let me remind you of the details around what these people were supposed to do to win this battle and watch the “walls come tumbling down.” Take note that these are God’s detailed instructions. He is the power behind the obedience.

**Joshua 6:1-7a,10-11,14-16,20** *NRSV (1)Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in. (2)The LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. (3)You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, (4)with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. (5)When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as 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 all the people shall charge straight ahead." (6)So Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and have seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark of the LORD." (7)To the people he said, "Go forward and march around the city…*

*(10)To the people Joshua gave this command: "You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, nor shall you utter a word, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout." (11)So the ark of the LORD went around the city, circling it once; and they came into the camp, and spent the night in the camp….*

*(14)On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days. (15)On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. (16)And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. …*

*(20)So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it.*

I imagine that first lap must have felt odd, maybe a bit strange, but with each circle, a holy confidence was building in their souls. By the seventh day, their faith must have been ready to pop. They arose before dawn, started their circle at 6:00 am and at 3 miles per hour they would have taken their seventh lap by 9:00 a.m. In keeping with God’s instructions, they hadn’t said a word in six days. They had been silently circling. Then the priests sounded their horns and simultaneously the shout followed. 600,000 Israelites raised a holy roar that must have registered on the Richter scale and the walls came tumbling down.

After seven days of circling Jericho, God delivered on a 400 year promise. He proved, once again, that His promises don’t have expiration dates. Jericho stands and falls as a testament to the simple truth, if you keep circling the promise, God will ultimately deliver on it in His own way and in His own time.

So, what is your Jericho? What miracle are you marching around? More than a thousand years later, another miracle takes place near Jericho. We find it in Matthew 20:29-34, where it states, “*(29)As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. (30)There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" (31)The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" (32)Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" (33)They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." (34)Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.* ***Matthew 20:29-34 NRSV***

**Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”** The Disciples think of this encounter as a human interruption, but Jesus sees a divine appointment. He asks the blind men, “What do you want me to do for you?” He forced them to define their need, to spell it out. He wanted to make sure they knew what they wanted. Jesus asks us the same question, “What do you want Jesus to do for you?” He wants you to boldly go to Him with details. Can you spell out the promises, the miracles, the dreams that God has put on your heart? Most of us would freak out. If we can’t answer, we are as blind spiritually as the two men in the story were physically. This could be the reason why our prayers seem pretty boring to us. If you are falling asleep during your prayers, there may be a problem. If your mind is wandering all over the place, there may be a problem. If your prayers are general and wide open, there may be a problem. That’s why our prayers aren’t just boring to us; they are uninspiring to God. If faith is being sure of what we hope for, then being unsure of what we hope for is the opposite of faith. Well-developed faith results in well-defined prayers and well-defined prayers result in a well-lived life. What do you want God to do? Start with the promises like we read in Matthew 6:33 and Philippians 4:6-7. Take time to think and pray through some God glorifying life goals. Keep a journal. Define your Jericho.

**What is your Jericho?**  Jericho is spelled many different ways. If you have cancer, it is spelled healing. If you have a family member who is far from God, it is called salvation. If your marriage is falling apart, it is called reconciliation. If you have a vision beyond your resources, it is spelled provision. Jericho might be someone’s name, perhaps your children’s names, or maybe even your grandchildren’s names.

The pastor of a huge church in Seoul, Korea wrote this, “God does not answer vague prayers.” Get specific as you are circling and praying for your Jericho. You can walk with a holy confidence that the blessing of God and His promises are sure. Let’s have a definitive answer to the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” Let’s seek God, seek His kingdom, and seek His righteousness and then be obedient and give God all the glory! This should change the way we pray for the challenges that are facing us today.