

Sermon

Sunday, May 5, 2019

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Joshua 6:15-27, John 8:12

Victory of the Light of Christ

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

It was seen as one of the greatest military victories in history. This Wednesday May 8, many parts of the world will celebrate V-E Day, Victory in Europe day! This day celebrates the formal acceptance by the Allies of World War II, of Nazi Germany's complete and unconditional surrender of its armed forces, marking the end of World War II in Europe. The victory was so powerful that eight days before that certain victory, Adolf Hitler can't fathom surrendering and commits suicide. On that original V-E Day, Victory celebrations would erupt all over the world. In London, crowds pour into Trafalgar Square and up to Buckingham Palace, where King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, appear on the balcony of the palace before the cheering crowds. Princess Elizabeth and her sister Princess Margaret would even be allowed to wander incognito among the crowds and take part in the celebrations. In the United States, the victory happens on President Harry Truman's 61st birthday. He dedicates the victory to the memory of his predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Later that day, Truman says the victory made it his most enjoyable birthday. Victory, just the word brings joy! We all need victories in our lives. The large and even little daily victories in our marriages and our jobs. Victories even in our walk with Christ, hearing his voice, and seeing His vision become a reality!

The Bible is full of victories. Today in Joshua we get to one of the craziest, wildest victories in Scripture, Joshua defeating the city of Jericho. Here's the back story. The people of Israel had just crossed over the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, the land of milk and honey that God had promised to Abraham over 500 years earlier. After spending 40 difficult years wandering in the desert of Sinai, the people of Israel are

now on the eastern banks of the Jordan. Their challenge: "Take the land of Canaan." However, their first obstacle is the city of Jericho with walls 11 feet high and 14 feet wide. At its top is a smooth stone slope angling upward at 35 degrees, where it joins more massive stone walls that tower even higher. A mighty fortress! Still, in those days, such cities could be defeated by being surrounded and the people starved into submission. Its invaders might try to weaken the stone walls with fire or tunneling. But no one, no one expected the kind of strategy that God Himself was about to implement for victory.

You can't make this stuff up. God tells Joshua to have the people march silently around Jericho for six days, and then, on the seventh day, with trumpets, they shout! And victory would be certain. Joshua follows God's instructions to the letter. And amazingly, when the Jews march, surround, and shout, the massive walls collapse instantly, and victory given! Victory of Victories!

Yet, as supernatural as this story sounds, there are four tangible keys for victories we can implement in the battles we all face in our lives. First, the key of obedience to the voice of God. Joshua knows that God's plan makes absolutely no sense, yet even through the craziness of it, he says, "I shall obey." Don't romanticize this story. Joshua would have been just as confounded as we are today, but he obeys. The key of obedience to God brings victory. Let me ask you, how might simple obedience to God right now, bring you a win?

Which leads to the second key. Joshua realizes he's living for an audience of one. Joshua has to look to God more than history, more than the manuals of best practices, more than the will of the crowd. Joshua had

to look to God above everyone and everything else.

Seeking wise counsel is necessary, but Joshua here lives for an audience of one. The loudest voice in His decision? The voice of the living God. Let me ask you, how might living for an audience of one and not the crowd right now, bring you a win?

Third, Joshua has to depend on God more than his own gifting. Joshua would have preferred to fight in hand to hand combat, something he could control, something he could tactically manage. Walking around the city? Shouting? It was out of his control. Joshua realizes that he has to release the control to God to gain victory. It's so easy for us to battle thinking our own giftings will get us through, instead of releasing it to God for Him to get us through into victory. Let me ask you, how might releasing control right now, bring you a win?

And finally, at some point, Joshua through the obedience, looking up, and depending less on his gifting, had to say Lord, "This is for your glory." You see, the way we go through our battles, either gives Glory to God or ourselves. There was no way Joshua could take the glory for this victory, it was too counter-intuitive! Just imagine after the battle, and all the generals are coming up to Joshua saying, "I can't believe with that strategy you won, it must have been of God!" Glory to God.

Many times the solutions to our battles are counter-intuitive because those solutions are meant to give glory to God before all else! For instance, that solution that seemed so clear, that at the last minute completely changed. That house you wanted to buy. That job you wanted. Nope, God might throw you a curve ball, just to remind you who is in charge, and to make sure He gets the glory.

These keys apply to every battle we face - our dreams, hopes, relationships, professions. Let us pray to God, "Lord, give me obedience first to you. May your voice be the loudest. May I depend more on you and less on me. May you be glorified."

Obedience. Audience of one. Releasing Control. For His glory. Sound like anyone we know? The name Joshua means Jesus. Doesn't Joshua's keys to victory perfectly describe the way Jesus Christ gained victory over sin and death? Jesus dying a hideous death, laden with our sin. He's crucified on a Good Friday Cross, takes our sins, deposits them in Hell, and rises again, giving us ultimate victory over sin! Jesus Himself lived in radical obedience to the Father. He lived for an audience of one, above the crowds. He lived a life depending on God, more than His own power to save Himself. He did everything to Glorify His Father who is in heaven. Jesus in doing so, tears down the walls of sin, death, and darkness. Jesus, in John 8:12, says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life!" Jesus has victory over Darkness, and through Jesus we have that same victory.

Our victories come when we empower these keys in our walk with Jesus Christ. When we call to Jesus in surrender and obedience. When we ache to hear the voice of Jesus above all to lead us. When we make ourselves second, Jesus first, with our only goal being His glory.

I need to make a disclaimer. None of this will make any sense to us, without being fully converted to Jesus. The final victory of our salvation will never be won without the conversion of our hearts through the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 18 Jesus said, "Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven for the ultimate victory." Theologian Steven Lawson writes, "Conversion involves an intentional turning away from sin and a turning to God in obedience through Christ to seek forgiveness - turning toward our creator and the one who will receive us when we die. It is not a partial change where we can straddle the fence between two worlds. It's a decisive break with old patterns of sin and the world and the embracing of new life in Christ by faith." Only when our hearts are converted through the Holy Spirit will we

want to live in obedience, will we want to live for an audience of one, will we want to lose control, and will we want to glorify the one who gives us victory.

Lawson continues by saying this therefore means there is such a thing as non-Conversion. Kind of going through the church motions. Yes we're sorry for our sins, sorry for how our sin has caused us to suffer, but not how it has offended a holy God. Where there is no conversion, there is no death to self. No submission to the lordship of Christ. No taking up a cross. No obedience in following Christ. No seeking his voice first. Only barren religious duty-bound activities.

During our Wednesday night debate between C.S. Lewis and the atheist Sigmund Freud, we quoted Lewis who said it like this: If conversion to Christianity makes no improvement in our outward actions...If we continue to be just as spiteful, prideful, envious, or ambitious as we were before, then, Lewis says, I think we must suspect that our conversion was largely imaginary.

On the contrary, with a true conversion, sin is abhorred. Pride crushed. Self is surrendered. Obedience lived. Christ is seen as precious. The cross is embraced as our only hope for victory. We long to tell others. Followed by deepest counter-intuitive victories!

I believe today is the day where Jesus is inviting us to say, "Lord, convert, re-convert my soul, for the most amazing victories I could ever experience." And just like a bride can't hear enough of her husband saying I love you, Jesus can never hear enough of our voice saying, "Jesus I love you. I desire to be obedient, to live for you as my audience of one, releasing control to you for your Glory." It's never too late.

I know this is true because of what we're about to do at announcements. We are going to dedicate two torches. These torches lit here in the front of the church are the symbols of the victory of light over darkness won by Jesus Christ. We are dedicating them to a daughter of St. Michael's Church. She was baptized here, went to church and Sunday School here. Yes, if Katie Peronneau Waring were still on earth, she would have turned 38 years old today, on this her birthday. Tragically her life was cut short. Yet she lives on in many of our hearts. Today, as we dedicate these torches representing Jesus as

the Light and Victor of the world, we are saying Jesus always has the last word, and that His victory will live on beyond us. As I said in Katie's funeral sermon ten years ago, "Jesus never, never, never gives up on any one of us. Victory is right there, an arm's length in Jesus. Jesus never gives up, not on Katie Waring not on any of us!" I believe Jesus is saying to Katie right now, I love you so much. As a sign of my love and victory Katie, think of all the hands of the children who will carry these torches, who will carry on the light of my victory over darkness.

We all need Victories, but the ultimate victory can only be found through Jesus Christ. Obedience. Audience of one. Releasing Control. For His glory. And our V-E Day.