



## AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLIN'

We're going to look at one of the most famous stories in the Bible today, one with a very famous song attached ...

### Joshua 5:13-6:27

As I said, it's a very famous story.

But the account of the destruction of Jericho has raised a couple of issues for people over the past 50 years or so:

- **Archaeological.** Since Kathleen Kenyon's excavation of Jericho in the 1950s, the consensus has been that the city was destroyed in the middle Bronze Age (1500 BC). The Bible seems to suggest a late Bronze Age destruction (1200 BC) – a 300-year gap. But the most recent study of the site (2020) indicates that Jericho was *rebuilt* in the late Bronze Age, out of mudbrick, then destroyed again. *That*, I think, is the Jericho here.
- **Moral.** The bigger, more ethical issue for a lot of people is the 'wholesale destruction' of the Canaanites. Are we looking at total genocide here? I don't think so. What is being described is the judgement of an evil civilisation, not the decimation of an entire people-group. Hence the sparing of Rahab's family (and others, as we'll see), and the fact that representatives of these groups went on to become a part of Israel.

But our main focus today is this: what brought those walls down? Jericho was a city that just kept coming back (it had been around for 7000 years by

the time of Joshua) and would have seemed nigh-on impregnable: 2 sets of walls, built on a *tell* or city-mound, with a ditch running all the way round. So, what brought down those walls?

You can argue faultlines; you can argue acoustics. But ultimately, it's worship. The account begins with Joshua meeting with God, who appears as a commander about to lead His army into battle. Why? Because this is *His* battle. Not Joshua's; not Israel's; *His* (that's why the instructions come from God Himself, 6:2-5). But rather than giving him a battle-plan, God gives him a call to worship (hence the *shofar*).

What brought down those walls? Worship did.

The account of the battle tells us 3 things about what worship looks like, principles that still apply to us today:

**1) Worship = Reverence.** The *shofar*, whether it's a ram's horn or a kudu horn, bends in the middle – a symbol of reverence to God. That's why the Israelites are told to march around the walls in silence for 7 days, following the Ark of the Covenant, with just the shofars blowing. There's a need for reverence, for silence.

That's a difficult one to grasp in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, isn't it? Because we are surrounded by noise, almost wherever we go – from the TV, the radio, the sound system, the PC, the tablet, the phone, other people's phones. We have filled our lives with so much 'stuff' – and I'm not just talking literal noise-pollution. I'm talking the busy-ness of life – and sometimes, the busy-ness of church, too. Now that's not an excuse to sit on our backsides and do nothing. But sometimes we need to learn to walk in quietness with our God, rather than rushing into battle.

So, how do we do that? Maybe start with a question or 2: "What do You want to say to me, God? What do You want me to do?" And pause.

Or in the words of Samuel, the prophet: "Speak LORD, Your servant is listening ..."

**2) Worship = Exuberance.** On day 7 the ram's horns give a long note and the people start to shout.

Now what's a shout sound like to you? A 'yay ...'? Or a 'R-O-A-R-R-RI!!!'? I might be wrong, but I lean towards the latter. I.e. there's a time for noise! There's a time for prayer that wakes the heavens and praise that shakes the earth! You can see it in the Book of Psalms. Yes, there are references to silence, to stillness ... but the tenor is exuberance. When the Israelites praised God, blowing on ram's horns and banging on drums, you could hear it for miles.

So why might my worship struggle to be this? Is it the key we're singing in? Is it the style of music? Is it cultural? Is it personal? Or is it that I've forgotten what I'm supposed to be excited about? The Israelites believed that God had given them victory – He'd done it before and He'd promised to do it, again. But they weren't just shouting *for* victory, but *from* it. Is that the issue – I've forgotten what it is that God has done for me?

Don't get me wrong: not everyone who makes a lot of noise is genuinely worshipping God. But I'm not talking about everyone else – I'm talking about *me*. What does God think of *my* worship sometimes? Does He hear excitement in *my* voice? Does He see it in *my* heart?

We'll make some noise for so many things in this world. Are we making noise for Jesus?

**3) Worship = Obedience.** The city walls collapse, not inwards, but outwards. Not only would this have provided a way in, it also would have helped fill the ditch around the perimeter, something that was a common defensive measure in ancient near-eastern cities.

In the Bible, the *shofar* is a signalling device: it was used to get God's people moving. It may have been the LORD's battle, but the Israelites were still required to enter that city and take it. Worship is not about who gets most emotional or 'touchy-feely' – it's about doing what God wants you to do. Not experience, but obedience. It was obedience that destroyed Jericho, just as it was disobedience that rebuilt it (during the time of King Ahab, according to 1 Kings 16:34).

Sometimes worship can look like jumping in the air; like raising our hands; like kneeling down; like faces on the floor. But sometimes it can look like making a difference; digging deeper to give more; or doing something you really don't want to, but you do it because God has told you to, or because there's a need. Did Jesus feel like dying on a cross? Just look at His words in Gethsemane: "Father, if it be Your will, let this cup be taken from Me ..."

Jesus did what needed to be done. *That's* worship.

### ***Crash!***

When I look at the community around me, what do I see? What do you? I see cities that need taking; ditches that need filling; walls and strongholds that need bringing down.

And the longer I'm a pastor the more convinced I am of this:

*God* is the only one who can do it.

What then does He expect of us? Simply, He expects worship. Not just singing our favourite songs or getting the service we think we deserve (as if we do!). We're talking reverence; exuberance; obedience.

*That's* what brings down walls.