

Title: *Doing Things God's Way*

Text: Joshua 5:13-6:20

In my first sermon in this series, I sort of gave a caricature of the American Dream. The book is subtitled *Rescuing Your Faith from the American Dream*. If someone would be tempted to call me subversive, I would mention a couple of different things. One, the gospel *is* subversive, and two, I am proud to be an American and I am thankful for the blessing of having been born in this country and living in this country. We need sometimes to be reminded that we are to be more beholden to the kingdom of God than we are to the United States of America.

In my previous sermon, I sort of caricatured the American Dream. You go to college, buy a house, get a good job, send your kids to college, and retire so they can do the same thing all over again. There's nothing wrong with that, we just need to ask ourselves if that is all there is to life or if God intends more for us than that.

The phrase American Dream was first used in 1931 by a man by the name of James Truslow Adams who spoke of "a dream . . . in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are."

You may ask, "Who could possibly have a problem with that?" I certainly don't. I thank God that by His grace, I was born in a country where I can dream and aspire and attempt to do whatever I set my mind to do, with one necessary correction.

As Americans, we are free *under God and before God* to become whatever we believe He wants us to be. That's the real key. It's not just about doing what we want to do, it's about discerning the will of God and doing what He wants us to do, not in our own strength and power, but in His.

When we're young, we start out with great dreams about all of the great things that we are going to do one day. When I was in seminary, I had all of the dreams of what a great church I was going to build one day. Now 25 years in, my dream is simply by God's grace and with His help, at some far distant point, to leave this church stronger than it was when I came here.

Even that is not a question of my abilities or my smarts or my own striving, but a matter of being used by God and being in a position to be used by God to carry out His will and to accomplish His purposes. The point is that we can be thankful to live in a country where the ethos is that we can do whatever we want to do and we can dream whatever we want to dream and it is recognized that we have an inalienable right to pursue happiness, but the great temptation when we have all of these blessings of liberty will be to think that we do it on our own, by ourself and in our own strength.

The premise here is that we need to rely on God's strength and His power and it's not so much our own dream of what we can do and become but the freedom we have to pursue God's dream for our life – a dream which will take us to different places that we would go if we were

just pursuing our own dream.

Joshua didn't know anything about the American Dream. He did know about following God in faith. He was one of the original spies who had been sent by Moses to scout out the promised land. They were at Kadesh-Barnea, poised to enter into the promised land when God told them to go up and scout out the land that He had already promised to give them. There were 12 who were given that privilege. They saw things there that made their hearts melt with fear. 10 of them came back and said, "Everything we've heard about the promised land is true, but the people there are like giants and we are like grasshoppers. There's no way we can go and take this land. They came back and their negative report made the hearts of the people melt with fear.

Nobody today names their children Shammua, Ammiel, or Palti. There are a lot of little boys named Joshua and Caleb because Joshua and Caleb had the faith to say, "If God is with us, we can go and we can take possession of the land."

Maybe one of the things that made the hearts of the majority of the search committee melt with fear was the fact that one of the first sights they encountered in their journey was the walled city of Jericho. It seemed like an impregnable fortress, too big, too strong and too secure for a group like a nation of freed slaves to try to take on.

Joshua had a lot of opportunities learning under Moses about leadership. Moses was one of the greatest leaders who ever lived and one of the most meek and humble. The failure of the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea meant that they would wander in the wilderness for another 40 years while that generation – except for Joshua and Caleb died off. Joshua had a lot of time to dream about and think about what it would be like to be in the promised land.

When the time finally comes for him to assume leadership, he's told over and over again, "Don't be afraid," "Be strong and courageous." I always had a great deal of admiration for Pope John Paul II. One of his mottoes which he frequently told the world's Catholics was "Don't be afraid." Shortly after his selection as pope, he went to his native Poland and told the people, "Don't be afraid." Shortly thereafter, the Solidarity movement started and a decade later, the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall fell. The three world leaders most widely attributed with bringing about the impregnable fortress of communism were Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II.

The book of Joshua is an amazing story of conquest and of a group of people on a journey living out of a promise that God has made to them. We have the commissioning in Chapter 1. Verses 6-9 say, "<sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. <sup>7</sup> Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. <sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you

go."

Several important points to ponder here. God tells Joshua that he will do it. If that is the case, what does he have to fear? He's also told not to let the book of the law depart from his mouth, meditate on it night and day so he can be careful to obey everything it says. That will insure prosperity and success – not success in the accumulation of wealth, fame and riches – but success in finding and accomplishing the will of God in his life. Then, he's promised God's presence with him wherever he goes.

In Joshua 2, they meet an unlikely woman by the name of Rahab with the unlikely profession of being a harlot. She told Joshua's men that the hearts of the people of Jericho were melting like wax because they'd heard some of the stories of the things that God had done on their behalf. We'll have more to say about Rahab in this evening's Bible Study.

In Joshua 3, we read about the crossing of the Jordan River and another incredible promise made to Joshua. In 3:5 and following, we read, "<sup>5</sup> Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.'" <sup>6</sup> Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses." <sup>8</sup> Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.' "

The people were to keep a respectful distance of a little over half a mile from the ark and when the ark came to the river's edge, once again there was another miraculous crossing of a body of water as the river just stopped and the water backed up until the Israelites got across.

Once the Israelites crossed the Jordan and had their feet on Canaanite soil, the time came for them to resubmit, once again to the rite of circumcision. During the Exodus and the time of wilderness wanderings, God didn't make such a big deal about it because the people were still "on the way" but now that they were in the land, the time came for them to reaffirm their covenant with God.

In 5:10 and following, we read, "<sup>10</sup> On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. <sup>11</sup> The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. <sup>12</sup> The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan."

Joshua could very well feel good about where he is. The people have crossed over the Jordan, they have had a series of victories that they can build upon and they can be confident that the hand of God is upon them. It's time for a group of people who have had God miraculously provide the manna for them to move into the land and to start living off of the fruit of that land. It's time for a group of people who were living on a promise to begin to realize that promise. You can live for so long looking for a promise to be fulfilled that you begin to think it's never

going to happen and when it does begin to happen, it catches you unawares.

In this moment of solemn preparation, he was near Jericho and contemplating and pondering all that lay before him. As he looked up he saw an imposing figure that he had never seen before and he looked up and asked him a simple question, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” It’s a perfectly reasonable question, one would think when you’re getting ready to head off into battle.

This figure whom many scholars believe to be a Christophany gives an unhelpful answer. To say this is a Christophany means that this was an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. I’ll give you a reason why in just a moment. He says, “Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord have I now come.” Joshua recognized that this was a significant figure. The questions that he asks seem reasonable, but they are the wrong questions. It’s like during the Civil War when Abraham Lincoln said something to the effect, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right”

He says, “Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” With that realization, Joshua fell down in worship. One reason we believe this was Christ was that no one else would have received this worship from Joshua. What is it that the commander of the army of the Lord wants Joshua to do? Joshua says, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The message is to take off the sandals because the ground where he is standing is holy. Before the conquest began, Joshua had to be reminded that he was leading God’s people on God’s mission.

Isn’t that really what getting a hold of the concept of radical discipleship is all about? Taking whatever you do and doing it as unto the Lord? We talk about the calling that is place upon preacher’s lives but do you view what you do as a calling from God? At the very least, do you do what you do because of His leadership in your life and it is the platform that he has given you to touch people that you might not ever be able to touch otherwise?

The conquest, even with some of the elements of it that we may find distasteful, such as the ban that came upon all the men, women and children of the conquered peoples was God’s work. It was the fulfillment of a promise that God had made to Abraham centuries earlier and is the continuation of the unfolding of His promise to give a land to His people. It was a big and an imposing challenge.

Notice in verse 1, the city was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. The people knew that something was up. They’d heard what God had done on behalf of his people and they were hunkering down in fear. It seems that once you introduce that element of fear into the equation, you’re halfway there.

Now the Lord lays out his military strategy to Joshua. It’s not “shock and awe.” It’s not we’re going to overwhelm them with a staggering display of military force. God says, “Walk around the city once a day for 6 days.” Have 7 priests carry rams’ horns in front of the ark.” You may say, “Now wait a minute. Couldn’t the people of Jericho have archers on top of the wall who

would just be able to pick off the men as they marched around the city? They would march out of range and they would march in obedience to God's military strategy for conquest.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> day, they were to walk around 7 times and on the 7<sup>th</sup> time, they were to march around the city 7 times and then blow the horns and let out a loud shout. Imagine what it must have been like for Joshua to hear this plan. Imagine what he must have felt like explaining this plan to his military men. He was confident that it was from God and that he was in obedience to his will.

<sup>7</sup> And he ordered the people, "Advance! March around the city, with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD." <sup>8</sup> When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the LORD went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the LORD's covenant followed them. <sup>9</sup> The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. <sup>10</sup> But Joshua had commanded the people, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" <sup>11</sup> So he had the ark of the LORD carried around the city, circling it once. Then the people returned to camp and spent the night there.

The walls of an impregnable gate city fortress came down without and Israelite casualty. Joshua did something great and he was following the call of God . . .

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