

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 2 May 2021**

Children's Talk: Things Look Easy When You've Put in the Work

- We're going to talk about a story today that you probably have heard before.
- In this story everything goes well for the Children of Israel and I want us to try to figure out *why* that is.
- In the story the Children of Israel have to conquer an enemy city that has big strong walls.
 - Imagine if you had to somehow climb over or get through big thick walls that maybe were as tall as the walls of the church.
 - And there would be people on the other side of the wall who were trying to keep you from getting over or through it and so they'd be throwing things at you and doing whatever they could to make it hard for you.
 - That seems like it would be pretty hard to get in.
 - Listen what happened for the Children of Israel.
 - When it says shophars that means horns that they would blow through that were made out of ram's horns, or the horns from a male sheep.
- Joshua 6:15-16, 20 (Kempton Project Translation)
 - ¹⁵ And it was, on the seventh day, that they got up early as the dawn came up, and went around the city according to this manner seven times; only on that day they went around the city seven times. ¹⁶ And it was, at the seventh time, the priests sounded with the shophars, and Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for Jehovah has given to you the city."
....
 - ²⁰ And the people shouted, and they sounded with the shophars; and it was, as the people heard the voice of the shophar, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell under itself, and the people went up into the city, each man to the front of him, and they captured the city.
- So the big huge walls that were in their way just fell down and they could easily go in and conquer the city and they did.
 - It looks so easy and it was, in a certain sense, but if we want to understand why things went so well on the day of the battle then we need to rewind a bit in the story and look at what happened on the days before the battle.
- Do you remember what the Children of Israel did on the days before the wall fell down?
 - They marched around the city each day for 6 days and they had to do it in absolute silence.
 - Joshua had said to them, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout" (Joshua 6:10).
 - We don't know exactly how big the city of Jericho was but marching around it probably would have taken at least an hour.
 - Imagine if you had had to do that for the last 6 days.
 - Go march around a city for an hour, in absolute silence on Monday; then on Tuesday; then again on Wednesday; and on Thursday; and on Friday; and yesterday.

- And somewhere in there you might start to feel like, “What is the point of this? Is it doing anything useful?”
- But the point was that they were doing exactly what the Lord had told them to.
- And they’d been doing that for a while.
 - They had crossed the river Jordan in the way that the Lord had told them to.
 - They had been circumcised like the Lord had told them to.
 - And now they were attacking Jericho in the way that the Lord had told them to.
- And that was why things went so well for them on that day was because they had spent days and weeks doing what the Lord had told them to.

- Think about a professional athlete.
 - Maybe a sprinter.
 - You watch a video of them running a race and winning it and it looks easy for them.
 - But the only reason it’s easy for them is because of the hours and hours they’ve spent for years and years training.
 - That’s why it looks easy for them on the day.
 - It’s the same thing with various craft projects.
 - Maybe you’ve seen some video of someone building something cool or painting an amazing painting and they make it look so easy but then, when you try to do it, it doesn’t look nearly as good and it’s certainly not easy.
 - But the only reason why they’re able to do it easily is because they have spent hours and hours for years and years practicing.

- When you face hard things in your life, they will be easier to face if you’ve done the work to try to follow the Lord in the time leading up to those hard times.
 - Sometimes obeying the Lord and trying to do the right thing will feel like it’s not really doing anything.
 - Reading the Word can feel like it’s not doing anything.
 - Praying to the Lord can feel like it’s not doing anything.
 - Like marching around Jericho on days 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 felt like it wasn’t doing anything.
- But working hard to follow the Lord and do the right thing will make things easier and better for us now and in the future.

- *Amen.*

When Having the Ark of God Doesn't Help

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith

2 May 2021

Intro

- Things don't always go as smoothly as they did in the story of the walls of Jericho.
- I want to read you another story from several generations after the story of Jericho.
 - The Children of Israel have been in the land of Canaan for a while and they're facing an attack from the Philistines.
- 1 Samuel 4:1-11 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
 - ¹ And Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle, and encamped by Eben-ezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. ² And the Philistines set themselves in array to meet Israel; and the battle extended; and Israel was stricken by the Philistines; and they smote in the battle array in the field about four thousand men. ³ And the people came to the camp, and the elders of Israel said, "Why has Jehovah stricken us today before the Philistines? Let us take to us from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, and let it come into our midst, and it shall save us from the palm of the hand of our enemies." ⁴ And the people sent to Shiloh, and carried from there the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of Armies, who sits upon the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.
⁵ And it was, when the ark of the covenant of Jehovah came into the camp, that all Israel shouted with a great shout, and the earth made a noise. ⁶ And the Philistines heard the voice of the shout, and they said, "What is the voice of this great shout, in the camp of the Hebrews?" And they knew that the ark of Jehovah was come into the camp. ⁷ And the Philistines feared; for they said, "God is come into the camp." And they said, "Woe unto us! for there has not been such a thing yesterday and the day before. ⁸ Woe unto us! Who shall rescue us from the hand of these magnificent gods? These are they, the gods who smote the Egyptians with every smiting in the wilderness. ⁹ Strengthen yourselves, and be men, O ye Philistines, lest you serve the Hebrews, as they have served you; and be men, and fight."
¹⁰ And the Philistines fought, and Israel was struck down, and they fled, a man to his tent; and there was a very great smiting; and there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. ¹¹ And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.
- Why did the Children of Israel suffer such a terrible defeat in this story?
 - They wanted to have the ark of the covenant with them.
 - They seemed to believe that God had the power to help them.
 - Why did God let them be slaughtered by their enemies?
 - How is this story different from the story of the defeat of Jericho?

The Symbolism of the Philistines

- The teachings of the New Church have an answer.
- They explain that the way things worked for the Children of Israel is that, if they were falling prey to a particular kind of evil or falsity, then a nation which represented that particular spiritual problem would attack them.

- You might remember that the Philistines were a problem for them for a long time and that's because what the Philistines represent is a perennial problem for the human race.
- Here are a couple of passages about what they represented:
 - *Apocalypse Explained* §817:6
 - All the wars that the sons of Israel waged against the Philistines represented the combats of the spiritual man with the natural man [or our spiritual self with our natural self], and from this they also represented the combats of truth conjoined with good against truth separated from good....
 - *Divine Providence* §326:12
 - The Philistines symbolised people caught up in faith separated from charity.
 - *Doctrine of Faith* §50
 - Because this religion, which is one of faith divorced from charity, continually tries to invade the church, therefore the Philistines remained in the land of Canaan and harassed the children of Israel again and again.
- The Philistines represented that tendency in each of us to want to be able to do whatever selfish things we want to do but believe that we're doing fine spiritually because we know some religious things and do some religious practices.
- It's like the Children of Israel in the story.
 - They wanted the power of the ark of the covenant in their battle.
 - They wanted to have Jehovah's help and protection.
 - But they didn't want to keep their side of the agreement that was represented by the object that was literally called "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah".
 - They wanted the benefits of the ark without having to actually obey the commandments that were written on the tablets inside that ark.
- So it was no wonder that the Children of Israel were slaughtered by the Philistines.
 - They weren't actually trying to follow the Lord, they were just superstitiously hoping that, if they had the trappings of religion, things would somehow go well for them.

When We Make the Same Mistake As the Children of Israel

- Unfortunately, we can fall prey to this way of being all too easily.
 - In our church we don't have a golden box, an ark of the covenant of Jehovah.
 - But we do have copies of the Word that also contain the 10 Commandments.
 - And we put copies of the Word in prominent places—like up on the altar in our church or some people have a copy of the Word in a special place in their homes.
 - And we have the open Word in the logo for our church and for our school.
 - And it's a beautiful symbol.
 - I love that a symbol of the Lord being present with us in His Word is at the focal point of our church and that we all look upward towards what the Lord teaches together.
 - That's beautiful.
- But we can easily make the same mistake as the Children of Israel of thinking that the symbol by itself will do something.

- The Word by itself can do very little for us unless we are reading it ourselves or listening to it be read and trying to understand it.
- And, in fact, even we understand it, that still will not really do anything for us, unless we're also trying to live according to it, in love to the people around us.

- *Divine Providence* §245

- [T]he church depends on its body of teaching and its body of teaching is based on the Word. Nevertheless, it is not the body of teaching itself but its integrity and purity, and therefore an understanding of the Word, that forms the church. The church in miniature that is in us as individuals is also formed and established not by a body of teaching but by our faith and by our living our faith. Likewise, what forms and establishes the church in miniature in any of us is not the Word; it is the faith based on truths and the life based on goods that we individually draw from the Word and apply to ourselves.

The Word is like a mine that has gold and silver deep down in great abundance; it is like a mine where the farther in we go, the more precious are the types of stone we find. Our understanding of the Word is what gives us access to these "mines." If we did not understand the Word's true nature as it is at its heart and in its depth, the Word would no more form the church in us than mines like these in the Middle East would make some person in Europe rich.

People who own the Word but do not receive from it any understanding of genuine truth or any willingness to do genuine good are like people who think they are rich because they have borrowed money from others or who think themselves well off because they include in their reckoning other people's properties, houses, and possessions, which as anyone can see is not their wealth.

Why Are We Talking About This Story?

- Why am I telling you about this story today and walking you through these teachings?
 - Am I just trying to make you feel guilty that you don't read your Bible more?
 - No.
 - Well, maybe a little.
- But no, the reason we're talking about this story is because we happened to read it at home earlier this week and it really resonated with me.
 - I think it resonated because of this project we're working on of trying to figure out the future of Kainon School.
 - Some of you listening to this have been very involved in the process and some of you watching this from overseas may not really know much about the school at all.
 - Regardless of whether you've been involved in Kainon School or not, I'm sure that you've had times of trying to plan for the future.
 - Making plans in your own personal life.
 - Making plans in your business.
 - Or making plans for your family.
- Part of what's hard about this process is realising that, even the best plan will fail, if people's hearts are not in it or if their hearts are not in the right place.
 - We're working on amending the constitutions of the church and school and looking at organisational charts and job descriptions and it's rather depressing to realise that we could formulate the best constitution and mission statement and strategic plan and key

objectives, *etc. etc.* for the school and they could all end up being empty, good-looking externals.

- I'm not saying that those things aren't important—they are very important—but if people could, as Jesus said, make “the Word of God of no effect” by the way that they chose to interpret it and apply it, then people could certainly do that with whatever plans we come up with.
- So what do we do?
 - We work on those externals and try to get them to be as good as we can with our limited perspective and wisdom.
 - But we also recognise that whatever projects we're working on with others will only succeed if individuals are doing their own individual work to get their hearts in the right place.
 - And some of the hardest and most necessary individual work to get our hearts in the right place is the work to try to keep the 10 Commandments.
 - To resist the urge to look down on other people .
 - To resist the temptation to hold grudges and want to get revenge against people who have opposed us or hurt us.
 - To resist the urge to take credit for things that we didn't do.
 - To remain committed to speaking the truth, even when it's going to cost us to do so.
 - To resist the urge to use and manipulate people to get what we want.
- And to try to be open to where the Lord wants to lead us.
- It can be hard to try to follow the Lord.
- Like the Children of Israel marching around Jericho on day 3 or day 6 or even the 6th time around the city on the 7th day.
 - It didn't seem like what they were doing was getting them anywhere.
 - When we read the Word or pray to the Lord we often don't get clear, immediate answers to our questions.
 - It's often the case for me when I read the Word in the morning, that I'm not exactly sure what I got out of doing that reading.
 - But I do trust that it connects me with the Lord and that it's doing something useful, even if I can't see it.
- And usually, when I talk to the Lord in prayer, I do not get immediate and obvious clarity about what to do next.
 - But it's not actually my role or anyone's role to always know what to do next.
 - My role and your role is to try to obey the Lord and keep His commandments as best we can and to try to love people and serve them.
- And part of what reading the Word and praying to the Lord regularly does is it helps us to see where we've messed up and where we might be heading towards messing up.
 - Because we're going to mess up.
 - We're going to forget the real heart behind what we're doing.
 - We're going to think that knowing better means that we are better than other people.
 - We're going to hurt people—sometimes unintentionally and sometimes intentionally.
 - The Philistines are going to attack again.

- But, if we're also trying to follow the Lord, then He will help us to see where we're going wrong.
 - If we're willing to change, then things will go better for us.
- That's how things went for the Children of Israel:
 - 1 Samuel 7:3-7, 10-13 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
 - ³ And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, saying, "If with all your heart you return to Jehovah, remove the foreign gods from your midst, and the Ashtaroth, and prepare your heart for Jehovah, and serve Him alone; then He will rescue you from the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ And the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and served Jehovah alone.
 - ⁵ And Samuel said, Bring together all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you unto Jehovah. ⁶ And they came together toward Mizpah, and drew water, and spilled it before Jehovah, and fasted in that day, and said there, "We have sinned against Jehovah." And Samuel judged the sons of Israel in Mizpah.
 - ⁷ And the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had come together to Mizpah, and the satraps of the Philistines went up against Israel. And the sons of Israel heard it, and they feared before the Philistines.
 - ¹⁰ And it was, as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines approached to battle with Israel, that Jehovah thundered with a great voice on that day against the Philistines, and routed them; and they were stricken before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and they pursued the Philistines, and they smote them until under Beth-car.
 - ¹³ And the Philistines were humbled, and they did not come again into the border of Israel; and the hand of Jehovah was upon the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

Conclusion

- Let's return to the Lord with all our heart.
- Let's remove the foreign gods from our midst.
- And let's prepare our hearts for the Lord and serve Him alone.
- And let's trust that that will be enough for the Lord to be able to lead us in a good direction.
- *Amen.*