

# The Ark: Prosperity

*The Ark*

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

**Bible Text:** Joshua 6:1-27

**Preached on:** Sunday, July 1, 2012.

I do want to encourage you this morning to turn in the Old Testament to the book of Joshua chapter six and as you are turning to Joshua chapter six we are coming to one of the most famous, most well known stories in all of the Bible. It is the story of the famed city, the fortress of Jericho and its famous walls coming down. It is a story that we teach in Vacation Bible school. It is a story that we teach in our homes. It is a story that is in all the children's Bible books. It is a story that even if we have rarely frequented a church or a worship service, we have some type of notion of it, of this famous city that the Israelites marched around and the walls miraculously came down.

As you are turning to Joshua chapter six we are continuing this summer in a series studying this famed Ark of the Covenant. And it is not just about this box that was covered in gold. It is not just about the cherubim that were placed on top. This what we know as the Ark of the Covenant stood for and represented the specific powerful presence of God. And what this sermon series this summer is all about is what happens when we find ourselves in the presence of God. What is the power that is made available to us and today we come to a word, today we come to a concept in Joshua six that if you will allow me to use the true definition of the word which has been absolutely perverted by the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Church of Jesus Christ. It is the word prosperity.

Now if you want a biblical definition of prosperity, go to the book of 3 John, just two pages left of the book of Revelation. And the Lord said, "I desire that you prosper to the level of your soul." And what that means is what good does it do to have all the toys in the world if you spend forever in a place the Bible calls hell. What good does it do to have all the trappings of the world if you do not have the presence of God in your life? And what we have unfortunately allowed in our culture today is this mentality that whatever it is that we feel like we need and we deserve, we just go out to the driveway, we put an x in it and we say, "God, put it right here and I would like it to be this color."

What we see in Jericho is that the people of God did not put an x in the driveway. God said, "I need you to come over here and let me draw the x." We have got the model upside down.

What we are going to see today from Joshua six is how do we experience, how do we pass a prosperous life. It is not going to deal with just with finances. It is not going to deal just with authority and ability, but being in the presence of God and letting him knock down the walls for us, not getting in the middle of the city and saying, "God, I need you to knock down this wall."

In Joshua chapter six this famed story of Jericho beginning in verse one. It says:

Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the Ark of the Covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD. And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD. And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD followed them. And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of time this morning allow me to fill in the blanks of what happened. They do exactly what God asked them to do. Six days one time, seventh day seven times. They blow the horns when they are supposed to blow. They hit the pots when they are supposed to hit the pots. They shout when they are supposed to shout. And what happens is an absolutely miraculous prospering victory.

This is also the story of the famed Rahab, the one who housed the spies that is protected with that scarlet thread, that emblem of salvation coming out of her window.

We know the story. We know the results. We know that Jericho fell. What we need to grasp today is how do the Jerichos in our life fall down? How do the walls of our culture, how do the walls of our lives in our community that are against the things of God, how do they come down?

Several things we need to learn from this passage and the first one is this. The plans of God. What are the plans for God in your life? What are the plans of God in my life? What are the plans of God for our community and for our country?

Notice what it says in verse one and two. The Lord said that Jericho is coming down. You understand that God has plans even bigger than yours. His plans are grand. They are great. They are magnificent. That is what we alluded to last week Ephesians chapter three verse 20.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua 6:1-9.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly...”<sup>2</sup>

Now any time you get two adverbs next to each other you have got some serious business there. Exceeding abundantly, more than we can ever think or ask according to the Spirit, the Holy Spirit that is within us.

Understand. As badly as you want a wall of addiction, the wall of struggle, the wall of whatever your Jericho is, please listen to me. God wants it knocked down more than you do. His plans are so grand that in the famed verse John 3:16 it says: “For God so loved the world...”<sup>3</sup>

Not that God so loved this group of people or God so loved that group of people. He didn't limit that. It says: “For God so loved he world...”<sup>4</sup>

When he came in flesh Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, sinless life, he did not come for a certain region. He did not come for a certain people. He came so all the world would hear, all the world would know and all the world could receive him and escape perishing and have everlasting life. Do you realize God's plans according to the book of 2 Peter chapter three are that none perish, but all come to repentance. That is why all around our campus the shirts that are on our mission trips don't say Change Conyers, Start Here. They don't say Change Rockdale, Start Here. They don't even say Change Georgia, Start Here. It says, “Change the World, Start Here.” Why? Because if we are going to be on page with God, we need to realize what he has written on his page.

For God so loved not Rockdale, though he does. For God so loved the world. His plans are bigger and greater and of a more grand status than we can ever imagine. But the second thing we need to understand about the plans of God for you life, our church's life, our communitie's life is not just that they are grand, but they are “guaranteed.” Now I have put quotation marks around this word. If I were to say it another way I might say it they are conditionally guaranteed. Notice what it says.

“Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho.”<sup>5</sup>

Not a shot has been fired, not a step has been marched and the Lord says, “As big as it is and as incredibly large as it is, I have...” In other words, as if it has already happened.

You know, one of the problems that we have among the Church of Jesus Christ is we take verses out of context or we only quote half of what is already there. And one of those famed verses is found in the book of Romans chapter eight verse 28 where it says all

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3:20.

<sup>3</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Joshua 6:1-2.

things work for good. And we quote that verse. We say, “Boy, all things work together for good, right?”

When you have got a Jericho in your life there is no good, is there?

You say, “Well, what about that verse?”

Do you know what the next part of the verse says? To those who love God and those who are called according to his purpose. In other words, when we are dedicated to the cause of Jesus Christ in our life, when we have a relationship with Jesus Christ and we would rather have him and his preeminence in our life than anything else, guess what? Then all things work together for good and you can be Paul in the middle of a jail and you say, “Oh, how good God is.” When we don’t love God and we are not called according to his purpose we can be living in the ivory tower and be crying in our milk about how bad life can be.

It says all things that means all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

Listen. When we are faithfully in the presence of God doing whatever God asks us to do when and where and how let me make you a promise. It is guaranteed that the walls of Jericho will come down. According to the Bible, 1 John 4:4: “...greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Those are the plans of God. Now most of us sit back and go, “I haven’t seen those. I haven’t experienced those. My walls... forget coming down. There is not even a dent in them.”

So how does this happen?

That is the second part. We need to understand what is the process by which God establishes his plans. Now you need to go to verses three and four to see how God moves.

And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.<sup>7</sup>

Can you imagine a young man right out of high school feels called to go to the United States Marine Corps? About this time of year he would be commissioned in what we know as 29 Palms in California. He would go to that great training base that that branch of the military has. Can you imagine on his very first night the base commander comes in

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 4:4.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua 6:3-4.

and says, “Son, congratulations. Welcome to the most elite fighting force in the world, the United States military. Here is your trumpet and here is your pipe.”

Think about that a moment. My dearest friend in high school entered the United States Marine Corps and it was a fully automatic weapon they gave him. Why? Because when we read this we realize the processes of God are not the processes of man.

Two things you need to grasp about that. They appear, the process of God for our Jericho to come down, they appear to be inadequate. To fight a military battle with trumpets and pots and pans is not in the place of the great military strategy. One of the reasons is it avoids two things you have to have, at least in our concept, to win a battle or to win a war. The first thing you need is you need to be stealthy. You need to have stealth. You need to be sneaky.

Now I have three little boys in my house and they are obsessed with this whole spy thing. They think it is really neat to find out secrets about someone else or that they might find out secrets about us and about a year ago we went down into Mobile, Alabama and we got to actually see the SR-71, the Blackbird, that Stealth airplane, so fast, so incredible. Back in the 60s and the 70s it had one job and one job only, to be completely undetectable and take pictures of the other side.

You realize that the security on that stealth plane was such that had it been shot down—and it was shot at over 1000 times and they could not catch up with it—had it been shot down, there is a special incinerator on the airplane that reaches some 3000 degrees. I believe, is that all of the film, (it was before text messaging, it was before all that stuff,) that all the 35 millimeter film, all of the camera equipment would be completely incinerated and dumped somewhere before it landed. Why? Because its whole purpose was not to be detected.

Oh, oh, but here forget stealth mode. We are going to march around for a whole week. We are not just going to let you know we are here. We are going to show you everywhere we are going. And then there is a second thing that the military whom I celebrate all the time, they really need power. I am of the opinion you can't give them enough and it can't be big enough, strong enough or powerful enough. You need some big stuff. You need some power.

So what did they have? Pots and pans and trumpets. Can you imagine the United States military going into its next battle and rather than calling the Rangers, rather than calling the Seals they call the First Baptist Orchestra. Come on, guys. We need you. It sounds ludicrous, doesn't it? Completely inadequate.

But here is the deal. How many times have you battled Jericho? How many times have you fought a struggle, fought in whatever it is and you have done it every way man tells you to do it and it doesn't work?

God, when he takes down a Jericho in your life... listen. It is going to appear absolutely inadequate the way he tells you to bring it down. It is going to appear absolutely backwards. It is going to appear ludicrous at times. The battle plan was inadequate and it also appeared to be inconsistent.

I want you to notice what happens in verse seven and eight. It says that the priests were to go in front of the ark. Now if you were here with us last week you remember when they crossed the River Jordan, the priests were to go in when it was at its highest point, put their feet in the river. And they were to stand back 2000 cubits, basically a half a mile. They were not to come near the ark. They were not to touch the ark. Yet here three chapters later the Lord is saying, "I want some of you in front of the ark."

Now one of the problems that we fall into is we don't like our world messed up. We don't like this thing called change, because anytime something changes, it makes us uncomfortable. Can you imagine being those seven guys who said, "Excuse me, Joshua. I thought we were supposed to be behind this thing, not in front of it"?

Let me give you a perfect illustration in most of your worlds. As you are having and expanding your family, particularly in a church environment, when your kids are, quote, "children," you serve in children's ministry and you go to children's camps and you help with this and that at Awanas. When your kids become teenagers it is just a natural thing to work with the youth ministry, work with the student ministry. When they get out of the house you take an Advil and you take a long nap. And then the Lord comes to you one day and says, "I want you to serve in the preschool again."

You say, "Oh, no, no. You have got this out of order, God. I am supposed to be... I am done." Can you imagine, who is speaking on behalf of God. "We are supposed to be behind. I am supposed to be done. This isn't supposed to happen this way."

See, one of the problems with our Jerichos is not only does it seem inadequate, but at times it becomes inconsistent, because we say, but God, you told me 10 years ago to do this and now you are telling me to do that? You told me 10 years ago to be behind, now you are telling me to be in front? This just seems inconsistent.

Let me tell you what the consistency here is. The Ark of the Covenant. Whenever they were surrounding the presence of God, whenever it was... by the way, guys, it wasn't the trumpets blowing that made those walls come down. Let me tell you what it was. It was the people of God being obedient to the presence of God and the walls came down. The most important thing we can do in our lives is not to make sure we are behind or in front or in the right order, but to make sure that we are exactly where God wants us. That is why they say—and I say it as well, the safest place in the world is exactly the spot God wants you to be. That is no matter what the world may say, that is the safest spot.

So we have got the plans of God that are great and grand. We have got the purpose of God that appears to be inadequate and inconsistent. So here is the final product. What

happens in our lives, what can occur if we allow these things to happen? What is the product? What happens when the walls actually come down?

Well, the first thing that can happen is this. You have got to ask yourself a question. This is an important question. Who gets the credit? Now because the Lord has gifted you, the Lord has given you wisdom, he has given you... knowledge. As we tell our kids all the time, the Lord has given you a brain for a reason. Use it. He has gifted. He has given us talents. But the question you have got to ask is: Who gets the credit?

Now I want you to go back and think with me that Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, and they are on the edge of Jericho. He has got all of his military. He has got all of his mighty men and he gives them the battle plan. We are going to march around six times and then we are going to march around seven times on the seventh day and the walls are going to come down.

Do you know what you do not find in Joshua six? You do not find Joshua showing up saying, "I told you so." Do you know why? Because that isn't Joshua sitting back and going, "This is crazy." Then it is, God, you are going to have to pull through, because if you don't pull through we are all dead here. And one of the problems we get into is that when the walls of addiction or when the walls of struggles or when the walls of debt or whatever it is come crumbling down, sometimes we sit back and go, "Wow, aren't I good? I pulled that."

We have to ask ourselves. Who should get the credit?

I want to share with you one of my favorite sports stories. It comes from 1975. It comes from the NFC championship game, the Dallas Cowboys were playing the Minnesota Vikings. The Cowboys were down 14 to 10. It is one of the most well-known plays in all of sports, so much so that almost every Saturday or Sunday somebody calls a play by the name that was designated that day. It was the last play of the game. The Cowboys were losing. They had half the field to go. They had a quarterback at the helm. His name was Roger Staubach. He was a graduate of the United States Naval Academy. He had served his time. He had won the Heisman trophy. He is now in what we know as the Hall of Fame of the NFL, a fabulous leader and a fabulous player. He had the ball. The time has run out. He scrambles to the left, he scrambles to the right and in a heave of desperation he throws the ball as hard as he can. He doesn't even make it to the end zone. His receiver at the time by the name of Drew Pearson has to stop his route, catch the ball on the four yard line and then he stumbles into the end zone to eventually go to the Superbowl. One of the most stunning plays in football history.

Roger Staubach is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio. He is a born and bred Catholic boy. What I am about to share with you, I do not encourage personally. I would tell you that it is not going to get you any closer to the Lord than anything else will. But they interviewed him after the game. And they said, "Roger, when you threw the ball, what were you thinking?"

He said, "I wasn't thinking anything. I said a Hail Mary." Have you ever heard of a Hail Mary pass? At the end of a collegiate game at the end of a pro game what do the announcers say? Well, there is only one option. You throw a Hail Mary.

Now listen. The Bible makes it very clear we don't get to the Father through Mary. We get there through Jesus Christ. I don't find anywhere in Scripture. In fact, if you want to know what Mary tells us to do, go to John chapter two and when turning the water to wine Mary turns to the servant and says, "Whatever Jesus told you to do, you better do it."

You don't find any passage in Scripture where we are to adorn, elevate or pray to the person of Mary. But what we do discover is this, that a man by the name of Roger Staubach said, "Don't give me credit. You can't give me credit for what just happened. That is beyond me."

That is exactly what we see happen with the battle of Jericho. Nobody could receive the credit. Nobody could say, "Joshua, great battle strategy. Boy, I tell you what, row five, seat three, those pots and pans you knocked it out." No. I guarantee you they were doing the same things you and I would be doing. We would be going, "I can't believe it worked." This is incredible.

But the question you are going to ask is: Who is going to get the credit. So let me throw that question back. Could be part of the reason we still have some Jerichos in our life is because deep down inside we know we are going to take the credit. Deep down inside we are going to attribute to our education, our upbringing, our whatever it may be, which leads to my final thought.

You know, if we want the walls to come down then you and I have a choice. We can either consecrate our lives to God or allow our lives to be cursed by God. And I want you to go back into Joshua chapter six and I am going to fast forward to verse 19 and I am going to show you what happens when the walls come down. I want to show you what happens when the enemies are defeated. Notice the first word of verse 19, my favorite word in the Bible.

But all.... Do you all remember what the word all means in Hebrew? All.

"But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."<sup>8</sup>

Go down to verse 21. "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Joshua 6:19.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua 6:21.



Go to verse 24. “And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.”<sup>10</sup>

I want you to notice the theme, that once God gave them the victory, once God brought down the walls, it doesn't say 10 percent. It doesn't say a good portion or a majority. It says that everything that comes from the victory, the accolades, the acceptance, the rewards, the finances. It is all his.

Let me be honest with you. I believe one of the reasons that Jerichos don't come down in a lot of our lives is because the Lord knows that he is not going to get our attention. He is not going to get our focus. How many times have you said, “Lord, if you just get me though this, I promise...”

They consecrated all, except for one man, a man by the name of Achan. There was one individual in the camp who for some reason thought he had something to do with this great victory. He thought somehow this could be attributed to his contribution.

I want you to fast forward to chapter seven verse one. Do you notice the first word again? “But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.”<sup>11</sup>

Fast forward to verse 13. The Lord says: “Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.”<sup>12</sup>

God says, “There is sin in the camp. There is a cursed item. Something is not consecrated.”

Now go to verse 21. This is Achan responding. “When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.”<sup>13</sup>

Achan basically in today's vernacular, takes 50,000 dollars with this attitude. I deserve it. Surely I deserve a little bit of the credit. Surely I deserve a little bit of the spoils. What did God say? All that you take is to be consecrated to me.

Listen. This isn't just a passage about money. We talk about 10 percent. Listen, the other 90 percent is to be his as well. This is about gifts. This is about talents. This is about

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<sup>10</sup> Joshua 6:24.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua 7:1.

<sup>12</sup> Joshua 7:13.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua 7:21.

ability. How dare we look into the face of an almighty God and say, “Look how good I am. Look how strong I am. Look how powerful I am.”

Do you realize that in a nanosecond the Lord can crush any and all of us in an instant? It is over. He is the almighty, we are not. He is sinless, we are not. He is powerful, we are weak.

This was illustrated to me very clearly a couple of weeks ago. You all know we have got three sons. Our oldest son is obsessed with the game of soccer which is fascinating because my wife didn't play much and I didn't play much. We don't know much about it. But he seems to know everything that there is.

So we spend a lot of our times and he was desiring to go to one of these tryouts where you tryout for one of these elevated teams and they charge you a lot of money and take you all over the country and you just say, “Ok, son, whatever makes you happy.”

The only problem was I didn't want to get into something that was going to be disappointing. I mean I am a parent and I don't know. I am being honest with you. I am thinking to myself, I hope I am honest about my kids. I am thinking, is he even that good? I mean, I don't want to go to all this tryout and all the sudden he comes crying disappointed and says, “Dad, I forget I know. Take up badminton.” I mean, I don't know.

So I contacted the powers that be and I contacted the coach and I said, “Coach,” “Is it possible that we just come to maybe a practice session and you can tell me is this really worth our time? Because, honestly, I don't know much about what is going on.”

He said, “Sure, that would be great.”

So we go to this two, two and a half hour practice session and he does all that they are supposed to do and at the end of practice the coach comes up to talk to me, because, after all, this was just an evaluation. Where are we on the spectrum of things? And honestly I don't have a real objective opinion, not just because he is my son, but I don't know the game well enough.

Now if we were playing baseball, I have got that one covered, ok? But not soccer.

So we get done and here is this coach, incredibly proficient, very well skilled. He says, “Well, Mr. Meyers,” he goes, “I have got some good news and I have got some bad news.”

I said, “Well, what is it?”

He said, “Well, the good news is he does A, B and C really well. He is really proficient.”

I said, "Great." He said, "The bad news is he does A, B and C not that well and he is going to have to work on that."

And I said, "Well, coach," I said, "is it even worth our time?"

He said, "Sure." He said, "Come to the try out. Just see what happens." I said, "Great."

So we are not wasting our time. We will just leave it in his hands and see what happens.

I am about to leave and the coach grabs me by the arm. He says, "Mr. Meyers," he says, "Can I share with you something you really need to hear, though?"

And I said, "Sure." He said, "Do you know what foot your son kicks the ball with?"

I said, "He is left-footed."

He said, "Do you know how many true left-footed soccer players are in the world?"

And I said, "I understand there are not a whole lot."

He said, "There is not a one on the field right now, but your son." I said, "Ok."

And he said, "You need to understand something. That left foot of his. That came from God."

I am not left footed. My wife is not left footed. We didn't even play soccer. But how dare we or how dare he one day fire a ball in the goal and say, "Look at me. I am left footed." My kid had anything to do with that?

How many children in your world? You solve a major problem, save your company lots of time and money. But look at me, I have got a great education. Look at me, boy, aren't I skilled? Look at me. Look at my gifts. I am good. Boy, I deserve more. I deserve this. They should give me more.

Do you see what we get? We get into the sin of Achan where we start thinking it had something to do with me. Nothing about Jericho had anything to do with them. It had everything to do with the presence of God marching around the city as God directed.

Before our time of invitation let me ask you this question. Is there any of you who on your best day can ever be good enough to deserve a seat in heaven. Is there any of you that can look at an almighty God and say, "Based on what I have done versus what I haven't done, I think I am good"?

You know, the Bible says there is none righteous, not one. It says all of our works are like filthy rags. And so we come to that point in our invitation where if you have not

already, this would be a great day to literally nail it to the Cross as we heard earlier and say, “Ok, God, I don’t deserve it. I am not worthy of it. But Jesus took it all so that I could be saved and forgiven.”

Don’t ever think that your salvation and your forgiveness and what you possess in Jesus Christ is because somehow you earned it or you deserved it. That is why the Bible calls it a gift you receive.