

Prayer

Bless this day, O Lord, and bless Your people as they worship You; whether in small congregations or large, whether in cities or villages or towns, whether young or old, whether new congregations or established churches, and in every country of the world. Unite Your people we pray in one great chorus of praise; ALLELUIA!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Rubbish

We will pray about the issue of rubbish, as it affects the whole world. Because of how we live we create vast amounts of waste; pray that God will challenge us to deal with it better.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for major industries facing trouble, such as car making*
- *Pray for those whose lives are spent in service of others*
- *Give thanks for the skills of medical staff throughout the world*

Meditation

I was wondering when the Lord might speak to me; and then it happened:
I was working at my desk, and He said 'Follow me';
I was in the middle of a meal, and He said 'Share with the poor';
I was thinking about myself, and He said 'Love your neighbour';
I was checking my bank balance, and He said 'Give sacrificially';
I was telling a friend about my work, and He said 'Share the Good News';
I was relaxing at home watching the news, and He said 'I am the truth';
I was enjoying a drive in my car, and He said 'I am Lord of all';
I was living life to the full, and He said 'I died for you';
I came to a stop, and He said 'follow me' ... again.

Bible Study - Joshua 6:22-27

²² Then Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, 'Go into the prostitute's house, and bring out of it the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.'²³ So the young men who had been the spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who were related to her (they brought out her entire family) and placed them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴ They burned down the city and everything in it, with the exception that they placed the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron into the treasury of the house of the LORD. ²⁵ Because she hid the messengers sent by Joshua to spy out Jericho, Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who were related to her; and they have continued to live in Israel ever since. ²⁶ Joshua then declared this solemn oath;

'Cursed before the LORD be anyone who attempts to rebuild this city, the city of Jericho! He will set it up at the cost of his firstborn and he will set up its gates at the cost of his youngest!'

²⁷ So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame spread throughout the land.

Review

We have now read through the whole story of the battle of Jericho, but as with any battle whether big or small, physical or spiritual, there are consequences. In this passage, Joshua deals with the consequences of the battle firstly by fulfilling his promise to save the household of Rahab and secondly by ensuring the proper and holy completion of 'cherem'. This means the handing over of the city and everything in it to God, for the destruction of its people, property and buildings, according to the instructions of Deuteronomy 20:16-18.

We studied the requirements of 'cherem' yesterday, and found that these meant the destruction of everything evil, in opposition to the Lord, or a potential temptation to sin. We all face moral dilemmas when reading this in God's Word because it seems rather cruel to us today, though it does express the real nature of our battle against evil. We will not spend any further time on this today, except to observe that certain special requirements of 'cherem' feature strongly in this text. All 'silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron' (a list identical to that in verse 19) were to be placed to one side and given over to the 'treasury of the house of the Lord'. Of course, we are speaking of a time centuries before the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the 'house of the Lord' meant the tent complex called the 'tabernacle', which housed the 'Ark of the Covenant'. Nevertheless, what this means is that the best, latest and most valuable material, art and technology was retained and placed in the hands of the priests, who took charge of it for God.

All this happened, of course, at a time when the people of Israel were looking forward to being able to build a permanent Temple to house the Ark; they did not know how long this would take, but it would have seemed an obvious next step in the establishment of Israel in the Promised Land. It is perhaps only a small point, but we do not live at a time when Christians connect their belief in God with the very best of technology, architecture, science and engineering. There are no Biblical 'rules' about this, but from time to time scripture reminds us that we should only offer the best, the most expensive and most beautiful, in worship to God. This can be controversial, but it is Biblical.

The next point is the contrast between the requirements of 'cherem' and the treatment of Rahab's family. The build up to this is extensive (see chapter 2), but the whole story of the battle of Jericho from 6:16 to the end presents a direct contrast between the requirements of 'cherem' and the salvation of Rahab. The way the story swings between one and the other is no accident, because the story is conveying a message, which is that those who face the advance of Israel have a clear choice, rather like the Gospel choice we preach today. People either object to or reject the Lord and reap the consequences of eventual destruction, or they respond positively to Him (as Rahab did) and receive salvation! At this point in Israel's life, before it had become institutionalised in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God's people appear to have been what God intended them to be, which is a witness and a blessing to the nations. There is no doubt that this is a Gospel message, which emphasises the generosity and faithfulness of the Lord to all who accept Him.

Finally, Joshua cursed the land on which Jericho was built. Archaeology, whilst having difficulty telling us exactly when its walls fell down (see yesterday's study), does agree that for a long period of time after it was destroyed, Jericho was not rebuilt. This, at least, verifies that Joshua's curse had an effect for many years! The truth is that the words we say do have power do affect people's thoughts and actions for good (a blessing) or ill (a curse). In addition, strong words of condemnation such as this, spoken by a great leader such as Joshua, had a powerful effect on people. In the case of Jericho, the city symbolised all that was dishonouring to God and had to be removed from Canaan. The curse both reflected this, and also acted as a warning about rebellion to future generations.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group, what does this passage teach us about the nature of salvation?
2. If everything that is best of the arts and crafts of the day is brought to be dedicated to the Lord, what can this teach us?
3. How important is spiritual warfare to the life of God's people today, and how can it be practiced without making it sound rather odd to ordinary people?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

From time to time, we can find echoes of the Gospel in the Old Testament, and not always where we would expect them. Here, the offer of God's salvation has been taken by someone who is one of the poorest and the most despised category of people possible; a prostitute. In some ways, this anticipates Jesus' ministry to the poorest people of His times, and His generosity to women in particular. We will not always spot these connections, but they are there!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What spiritual battles do you face today, and how can they be turned into spiritual blessings? The Lord often shows us the clues to the way forward within the most difficult of circumstances, and it is up to us to watch for these and act on them when we see them.*
- *Pray for those who have turned away from the Lord. Pray that they will have the courage to turn and accept what God wants, so much, to offer them.*

Final Prayer

Thank You Lord God Almighty, great protector and guide. Your wisdom and compassion work hand in hand to help us on a daily basis, and we give You all the praise and the glory, in order to say 'thank you' for the benefits of Your care. Bless us now as we pray to You, and lead us on! AMEN