

Our Vanguard and Rereward – Joshua 6:1-2, 8-16 (Isaiah 52:12; 58:8)

I. Introduction:

- A. After spending a day in the Lord's house followed by a restful night, do you ever wake up on Monday morning full of dedication to God and excited about doing something special for His glory?
1. *"This is going to be a good day. I am going to be victorious today, getting lots of things accomplished."*
 2. *Lord, I give myself to you, and by your grace, I will pass through this day pleasing you with my service."*
 3. Perhaps this is sin-free as far as you can tell, **but** by the end of the day, you realize that you haven't really accomplished much of anything of eternal value.
 4. You believe that you have done everything God has asked you to do; you have followed His will explicitly.
- B. But at the end of the day, all you've done is walk around Jericho, ending up at the same place you began.
1. Now, you are **tired**; your **feet** are **sore**; and your **head aches** from the sun beating down on you.
 2. You've been with lots of people all day long, but you've had **no real fellowship** with anyone.
 3. Then eventually, you pillow your head, thinking and praying that tomorrow will be a better day.
 4. **But** – t bed time on Tuesday, you look back and see that day was essentially as Monday had been.
 5. In fact, by the end of six days, almost an entire week, you aren't sure you've accomplished anything at all.
 6. Do you ever have weeks like that? You've purposed & surrendered, but nothing special came as a result?

II. Let's think for a moment about Israel's battle at Jericho.

- A. Why did the Lord have Israel walk around Jericho every day for six days?
1. **Why** did He **so cruelly** tell the people that they couldn't talk or enjoy one another's company?
 2. **The only noise** was the blasting of the ram's horn trumpets, and that quickly got to be really boring.
 3. Was the Lord **testing the obedience** of His people? Was He testing **their faith**?
 4. The omnipotent God could have given Israel a victory over Jericho during the first day.
 5. Was He **testing the resolve** of the enemy?
 - a. Was He giving them time to further inflate their egos and pride?
 - b. Or was He giving them time to repent?
 6. Was the Lord exercising and strengthening the legs of Israel for the seventh day, when they'd have to push themselves to go around the city seven times?
- B. Or – did the Lord have a **special lesson for you and me**?
1. Was God showing us that many days in our lives would be spent in **apparent** wasted effort?
 2. How many weeks seem to be spent with our wheels spinning in the muck and mire of the world?
 3. The truth is: there **may always** be six days of apparent emptiness before the one great day of victory.
 4. And if we haven't been faithful to the Lord in other six days, not even the seventh will be victorious.
 5. We have to be careful not to run ahead of the orders of the Lord, even in our attempts to serve Him.
 6. When it is His **will** that we **walk** around the city with apparently no result, then we walk around the city.
- C. There is a word used twice in this history that I would like to highlight and pursue just a bit.
1. It is a word I am almost certain you have not used today, unless it was in reading your Bible.
 2. I doubt that you have ever used this word in ordinary conversation.
 3. On the surface it is **not difficult** to understand, but most people probably don't **fully** understand it.
 4. **Joshua 6:9** says, *"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."*
 5. And then in **verse 13** – *"And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the REReward came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets."*
 6. Judging from the context, what would you say that the word **"rereward"** means?
 - a. Does it mean to re-reward; to reward a second time?
 - b. Give me some feed back. What does it seem to mean? Rearward?

- D. Let's go back to my initial illustration and the day you are finishing.
1. Some Wednesdays may look like the first six days of Israel's attack on Jericho – bland, useless, pointless.
 2. On the other hand, other days may look much, much worse. There may have been innocent mistakes.
 3. There may have been accidents, and you may have created problems for other people to solve.
 4. There may have been an unexpected trip to the ER or a second trip to the grocery store for things you forgot to get the first time.
 5. And you could have failed the Lord's tests or the Devil's temptations; there could have been sin today.
 6. Today might have been a **dull day**, or a **down day**; it might have been a **bad day**, a **sin-filled day**.
 7. Did you break the Lord's command, speaking when He told you to be silent, observant and worshipful?

III. Please turn to *Isaiah 52:7*.

- A. *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"*
1. We don't need the New Testament to tell us that this is talking about evangelistically sharing the gospel.
 2. *"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion."*
 - a. These watchmen aren't priests or Levites, they are the evangelists.
 - b. They are face to face with the Lord, and with one another, rejoicing in His grace.
 - c. Their hearts are united, joyfully sharing the good news of the Lord's saving grace.
 3. *"Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."*
 - a. Isaiah was probably referring to escaping Babylonian captivity, but it reminds us of personal salvation.
 - b. It took the mighty power of God to save our sinful souls. He made bare His holy arm to redeem us.
 - c. He glorified Himself before the wicked and the unbelieving.
 4. *"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD."*
 - a. Now that we are His children and saints of the Lord, we are to live like saints.
 - b. Salvation from sin is not an insurance contract; it is a new life spent in full surrender to the Saviour.
 5. *"For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward."*
 - a. When Israel left Egypt, they departed in haste & with various degrees fear, not knowing what was next.
 - b. They were being led by Moses, whom they didn't know very well and whom many didn't trust.
 - c. But there should be no fear, and certainly no distrust, when it comes to following the Saviour.
 6. The Lord – Jehovah – will go **before** you, **AND** your God will be your **rereward**.
- B. There is that word again – *"rereward,"* and we are told that **God** is the **rereward** of His **saints**.
1. He is protecting our backs, and we are told that He will go ahead of us as well.
 2. The Lord our Saviour goes before us and behind us.
- C. There is another word we don't often use, but one with which you are probably familiar – *"vanguard."*
1. The word isn't in the Bible, but its meaning and principle certainly are.
 2. The *"vanguard"* is the body of troops which goes before the rest of the army, or as it once was called: *"the van."* The *"vanguard"* are the trail blazers and scouts.
 3. But more than that – they are the Marines who first fight their way onto the shore – establishing the beach-head, for the rest of the army to occupy.
 4. *Isaiah 52:12* tells us that our Lord is **both** our *"vanguard"* and *"rereward."*
- D. Now, I'll share with you the **full meaning** of the **Hebrew word** translated *"rereward."*
1. It is not incorrect to picture it as the troops who are protecting the rear of the forward-moving army.

2. But according to Strong, in agreement with other experts I've checked, the word suggests much more.
 3. It means: *"to gather; to assemble and bring along; to put all together, to receive, to recover."*
 4. The *"rereward"* include the physicians, the chaplains, and the quartermasters who care for the army.
 5. They pick up the pieces, encouraging the stragglers and others who are struggling to move forward.
- E. Imagine the people of Israel walking around Jericho – particularly on that seventh day.
1. There were soldiers in the vanguard whose wives were well behind them, following the ark, and those ladies were with their five kids, including one baby in her arms and the toddler of the family.
 - a. Some of those ladies were even expecting another child, and they were not feeling very well.
 - b. Perhaps there were others who were ill or who had been injured.
 - c. There may have been people who were struggling to circumnavigate that city.
 2. But there were people in the rereward, whose job it was to assist those in need.
 3. They were there to gather up and to pick up the pieces, to put them all together in order to accomplish the Lord's will.
- F. But far better than a nurse with wheel chair is our omnipotent loving Lord. **HE** is our *"rereward."*
- G. So you began your Wednesday with every intention to bring glory to the Lord, but your day fell apart by 10:30.
1. All your plans got derailed through no fault of your own, but then you **did** get angry, and you did sin.
 2. You may have gotten discouraged and displeased with yourself, perhaps with some justification.
 3. But you don't need to fall out of formation. You are commanded to push forward, around & around the city.
 4. And remember, the Lord is your rereward.
 5. It is not that we are not responsible to stay up with the rest of the nation, but remember when things get tough, the Lord is there to help and bless.

IV. Let me add one more verse. Please turn a couple pages to *Isaiah 58:1*.

- A. *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. YET they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God."*
1. Doesn't this sound like general tenor of the Christian life?
 2. Doesn't the Christian yearn to know the ways of the Lord, seeking God's face and trying to live in a righteous manner?
 3. And yet there are still so many transgressions and sins in their lives. There is so much waste.
 4. Thankfully there is a divine Mediator – an intercessor and helper to us in our weaknesses.
- B. Notice **verse 8, Isaiah 58:8** – *"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward."*
1. One of these days, our trials, temptations and even our earthly opportunities will come to an end.
 2. It may be that the Lord will come this evening and sweep us all up into His presence.
 3. At that point *"the **GLORY** of the LORD shall be our **REREWARD.**"*
 4. The meaning here is not simply that the Glory of the Lord will be our reward, even though that is true.
 5. The meaning in this case is that God's glory will gather even those parts of our lives which have been stumbling along, hardly keeping up with the life we **should** be living, and God will put it all together and receive it to Himself.
 6. One of these days, after all our struggles and failures, we will be swallowed up in the glory of God.
- C. *"The **LORD** will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your **REREWARD.**"*
1. Praise His wonderful name for another of His precious promises.