

INTRODUCTION 引言

We will study a familiar passage on the first Sunday of the year. Even your kids should know the story about crumbling of the Jericho wall. Let us recap the background. By this time, Moses had passed away. Joshua was the new leader. The Israelites had crossed over the Jordan river and entered into Canaan. God was about to fulfill His promise to Abraham and gave the land to the Israelites. Jericho was their first battle. It was a city fortified with high and thick wall. The Israelites now camped at Gilgal about two miles away. Joshua sent two spies to survey Jericho. A local prostitute named Rahab told them that the people of Jericho were in fear. They heard everything about the Israelites from the time they left Egypt to how God helped them defeat various nations along their way. The news should be a huge encouragement to the Israelites. They knew they would conquer Jericho. But they did not know how to achieve that. We can share the sentiment. We know in our hearts that God will lead us into the future. However, unknowns in life bring us anxiety. We cannot sit and wait for God's promises to come true. Just like the Israelites did, we need to take actions to possess them. What are your plans in the new year? What do you hope our church to be like? We know the struggles in the past two years: the pandemic, inflation, lower attendance, spiritual complacency, etc. We can yield to the fear about things we have yet to see. We can also make up our mind to rely on God. The real war the Israelites and we face is the same. It is an inner struggle to surrender our will to the Lord.

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Take Off Your Shoes 脫掉鞋子 (5:13-15)

Let us begin by reading **5:13-15**. God asked Joshua to take his shoes off. Joshua was facing a monumental task. He surely remembered the mistake fellow Israelites made 40 years ago. They did not believe in God's promise. They were afraid of their enemies. Joshua and Caleb told everyone to march forward. But they suggested going back to Egypt. Therefore, God disciplined them. Men 20 years and older gradually died in the wilderness. We can imagine how people would educate their young ones during that painful time: "Don't follow my bad example. Trust God! He will take you into Canaan." Now Joshua had to lead a troop to fight Jericho. But how? While Joshua was walking toward Jericho, he met a man with a drawn sword in his hand. He was ready to fight! Joshua asked the man: "Are you with us or with our enemies?" The stranger responded that he was the commander of the Lord's army. Bible scholars have different views about this man. He could be an angel or a manifestation of Jesus in the Old Testament. At least we are sure that he was a heavenly being. The important point is not which side he was on, but which side Joshua was on. Joshua had to realize that he was serving under God. The Israelites could only win if they were on God's side. Today, we like to label people to distinguish between us and them. There are the left versus right, conservative versus liberal and even Baptist versus other denominations. The only team we

need to join is the Lord's army. God is the perpetual winner. Why participate in another club? Joshua had to keep in mind the same thing. The true battle was between God's righteous Kingdom and the false gods of Canaan. God would subdue the spiritual enemies for the Israelites. Joshua then prostrated himself before the commander and asked for directions. Being a soldier, Joshua understood the chain of commands. He must follow the orders from an officer of a higher rank. The commander told Joshua in verse 15: ... **“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.** Removing one's shoes was to show respect to a person of distinguished status. It is similar to taking your shoes off when you enter the home of an Asian family. Just remember not to wear any “holey” sock. But of course, a practical reason is to avoid bringing dirt in. The commander explained that Joshua was now standing on a holy ground. God's presence sanctified the place. Does that scene look familiar? God also told Moses to take his shoes off when He revealed Himself in a burning bush. It was a confirmation that Joshua was the true successor of Moses. Another symbolic meaning is that God was now leading the Israelites into Canaan. The Kingdom of Light was invading into the kingdom of darkness. We are God's soldiers sent to a campus, work-place and neighborhood. Our true enemies are not the people who do not treat us nicely. Our true enemy is Satan who exerts his influence in this fallen world. Jesus told us clearly that the world will hate us because it hates Him first. We will be defeated if we do not rely on God. We will fall to temptations if we count of ourselves. We have to recognize our Commander before we leave home every morning. You can pray a short prayer: “Lord Jesus, I pledge my allegiance to you once again. I don't know what battle I may face today. But I put my trust in You. Please protect me and give me wisdom and courage to be a faithful soldier of Yours.”

2. Take Away Your Senses 放下常理 (6:1-5, 10-11)

God told Joshua to take off his shoes. Next God ordered him to take away his senses. Joshua had to submit his human logic to the Lord. He must obey God's instructions even though it did not make sense to him. Read **6:1-5**, then also **verses 10-11**. What kind of plan was that? God did not even need to explain why that would work. By now, the people in Jericho were very afraid. They shut the gate to prevent enemies from entering, and also deflectors from escaping. God told Joshua that He had delivered the enemies into his hands. It means a sure win! If I were Joshua, I would have expected God to provide details about how to attack in the following conversation. There are at least three ways to overcome a wall: climb up a ladder, dig a tunnel or use some tools to knock through it. But God asked His people to go around the wall for a total of thirteen times. It made no sense. Here is the formation: some armed guards would lead the procession, followed by seven priests blowing their trumpets, then the Ark and finally other guards at the very end. What was the purpose? How would you feel when you see some enemies walking around your city? The first reaction is confusion. You wonder what they are doing. There was no sound except from the trumpets. There was no attack. The soldiers went back to their base afterward. Then they repeated the same process the next day. Other than being a psychological tactic, it could also serve as a final signal to call for surrender. Some priests blew their trumpets. The Israelites had two kinds of trumpets. One of them was made of silver. It was used to sound an alarm or to call for a

celebration. The trumpets here are made of ram's horns called shofars. They make a dull and deep sound. During the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25), the Israelites blasted shofars to call for repentance. Therefore, the sound was a reminder of God's grace and people's relationship with Him. Other than trumpets, the other item was the Ark. It symbolized God's presence. Encircling the city with the Ark would indicate that God was about to claim the area. Therefore, the march was a religious ceremony. It did not make sense to anyone. God's plan often does not make sense to us either. The whole gospel sounds like a fairy tale to some people. It is hard to imagine that God sent His Son into the world, and had Him killed on a cross to save us. Believing in an invisible God does not make sense too. The Lord invites us to lay our burden on Him through prayer. How does that work? We do not know! But the results prove that prayer works. Our faith will continue to grow as God answers us in big and small ways. Jesus told us to seek God's Kingdom first, then God will provide for our needs. Do you believe that promise? Then why do you put your career, money and kids above God? Why are you so busy with your second job or hobbies that you do not have time to attend church meetings? Why do you wait till the end of the year before dropping off your offering? When coworkers discuss church ministries, we worry too much about plans, manpower and money. But God asks if we have prayed enough. We do not receive if we do not ask Him. God's plans make perfect sense to Him. Trust and obey Him, for that is the only way we will receive His blessings.

3. Take Over The Spoils 奪取勝利 (6:15-21)

Joshua took his shoes off to show his honor to God. He and all the Israelites must take away their senses to follow God's instructions. They did obey God. Now we come to the seventh day of their marching. It was time to take over the spoils. We continue our reading in **6:15-21**. The priests blasted a louder and longer blow. The soldiers roared. The wall crumbled with the noise. It was likely that God used an earthquake as a means. The men then rushed in. Joshua gave them clear orders of what to do. They had to kill all the people and animals. But they must spare Rahab and everyone in her house to return her kindness for hiding the two spies. All the precious metals would be kept for God. No one could take any plunder. Why did God ask His people to slaughter all the living things? We are often troubled by a passage like this. First up, God did not give the same order when the Israelites attacked every city. There are only six incidents in the Old Testament where the Israelites got rid of all their opponents in a town. Second, we have to pay attention to the phrase "the devoted things." The expression means "dedicated for complete destruction." Joshua's message in verse 18 was: "Do not take anything dedicated for complete destruction, otherwise you and the whole camp will be destroyed too." A good analogy we all know is quarantine. A person has to be isolated for two weeks or so until he/she shows no COVID symptom, lest the person may spread the virus to others. The reason here is that everything belonged to those pagan people had to be removed. Otherwise, they would contaminate the spiritual life of the Israelites like a plague. Deuteronomy 20:17-18 is a helpful reference: **17 Completely destroy them – the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – as the Lord your God has commanded you. 18 Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.** Those six people

groups were major inhabitants in the Promised Land. God warned the Israelites about the negative influence they could bring. Unfortunately, God's people did not listen. Idolatry became a recurring problem for the Israelites. The spiritual lesson for us is that we must stay alert to the people or things that will stumble our faith. You must remove all the religious objects if you observed another religion before you became a Christian. Get rid of every statue, book and lucky charm. Satan can use those items to attack you. If some friends keep inviting you to a bar or casino, then you have to make a decision about the friendship. There is no compromise. Instead, associate with some mature Christians and encourage each other. Eventually, the Israelites captured Jericho. It was like a firstfruit in a series of military campaigns that was offered to God. God assured them subsequent victories if they remained faithful to Him. Today, what are our spiritual spoils? Our hearts should be the first gifts to God. It all begins with our commitment to Him. God's Word will change us, and the people around us will notice. God will bless us and our family first, then bless others through us. Jesus sends us out to win souls for His Kingdom. Those are also spiritual spoils for God. Even before we share the gospel with others, our godly examples can be effective witnessing tools. Everything starts from our personal relationship with God. Our hearts for God will influence our behaviors. There is no short-cut or magical formula.

CONCLUSION 結論

God is drafting the Israelites and all the Christians to a war. The real battle is an inner struggle to surrender our will to Him. We can only win if we listen to our Commander. Victory is achieved by faith, not by force. Jesus Christ had won the ultimate battle for us. He defeated Satan on the cross, Jesus then rose from the dead. We will have a victorious life over sin when we follow Him. A new year is a new beginning. Do you have any big plan? Where is our church heading? We can succumb to our enemy with fear. Back then, the Israelites were afraid of the Canaanites when they saw their cities and walls. They did not trust God. They ended up running around in circles in the wilderness. We as individual believers and as a church can repeat what we did last year. At the end, we will be running around in circles too. By God's grace, we have to make some drastic changes. I have some suggestions for you. Please open the envelope. There are two slips of paper inside with a list of action items for you to consider. Do not write anything yet. We are supposed to have some prayer time today. But instead of a group prayer, I will give you some time to pray on our own. Ask God to give you strength and determination to obey Him. After we pray, then you can check the items you decide to do this year.

INTRODUCTION 引言

我們在今年的第一個主日會來查考這一段熟悉的經文。即使你的孩子也應該知道耶利哥城牆倒塌的故事。讓我們回顧一下背景。在當時，摩西早已去世了。約書亞是新的領袖。以色列人越過約旦河進入迦南。神快要實現祂對亞伯拉罕的承諾，把土地賜給以色列人。耶利哥是他們的第一場戰役，那個城市有高而且厚的城牆。以色列人現在於大約兩英里以外的吉甲紮營。約書亞打發兩個探子去窺探耶利哥。當地一位名叫喇合的妓女告訴他們，耶利哥城的人都在恐懼中。他們聽過以色列人的經歷，自從他們離開埃及以來，神幫助他們擊敗沿途的不同國家。這個消息對以色列人來說肯定是很大的鼓舞。他們知道一定能征服耶利哥，但他們不知道如何達到那個目標。我們可以體會他們的感受。我們內心知道神會帶領我們走向未來。然而，生活中的未知數會給我們不少焦慮。我們不能只坐在一邊等待神的應許成就。就像以色列人一樣，我們需要採取行動來得到神的應許。你在新的一年有什麼計劃嗎？你對我們的教會有何期望？我們都知道過去兩年的掙扎：疫情、通貨膨脹、出席率下降、屬靈的安逸等。我們可以被還沒有發生的事情嚇倒，我們也可以決定完全信靠神。以色列人和我們都面對相同的戰爭。真正的掙扎是勝過自我，使我們降服予主。

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Take Off Your Shoes 脫掉鞋子 (5:13-15)

讓我們先讀 **5:13-15**。神吩咐約書亞脫掉鞋子。約書亞面臨著一項艱鉅的任務。他肯定記得 40 年前以色列同胞犯的錯誤。他們不相信神的應許，他們也害怕敵人。約書亞和迦勒勉勵大家向前邁進，但他們建議回埃及去。因此，神管教他們。20 歲以上的男人漸漸地死在曠野中。我們可以想像在那段痛苦的時期人們會如何叮嚀他們的孩子：「不要學習我的壞榜樣。要相信神！祂一定會帶你進入迦南。」現在，約書亞準備率領軍隊與耶利哥人打仗。但是如何安排戰略？當約書亞走向耶利哥時，他遇見一個手裡拿著拔出來的刀的人。他已經準備好打鬥了！約書亞問那個人：「你是我們一伙的，還是和我們的敵人一伙的？」那個陌生人回答說他是耶和華軍隊的元帥。聖經學者對這個人的身份有不同的看法。他可能是個天使或是耶穌在舊約中的顯現。至少我們知道他是來自天上的使者。重點不是他站在哪一邊，而是約書亞站在哪一邊。約書亞必須明白他是在神之下服事。以色列人只有站在神的一邊才能得勝。今天，我們喜歡給人

們貼標籤以區分我們和他們。有左派與右派，保守派與自由派，甚至浸信會與其他宗派。我們唯一需要加入的隊伍就是主的團隊。神是永遠的贏家。為什麼要參加另一支隊伍？約書亞必須記住同樣的事情。真正的爭戰是神公義的國攻打迦南的假神。神會為以色列人征服屬靈的敵人。約書亞然後在元帥面前跪下。作為一名士兵，約書亞了解命令的傳遞。他必須服從上級軍官的命令。元帥在第 15 節告訴約書亞：...「把你腳上的鞋脫下來，因為你所站的地方是聖的。」約書亞就照著行了。脫鞋在當時是表示對地位顯赫的人的尊重。這類似於進入亞洲人的家時必須脫鞋。請記住不要穿任何有洞的襪子。但當然，一個實際的原因是避免把灰塵帶進屋子。元帥解釋說，約書亞現在站在聖地。神的同在使那個地方成聖。那個場景是不是眼熟？當年神向摩西在荊棘火中顯現時，祂也要求摩西脫掉他的鞋子。這證實了約書亞是摩西的真正接棒人。另一個象徵含義是神現在要帶領以色列人進入迦南。光明的國度要佔領黑暗的國度。我們是神的軍隊，被派往校園、工作場所和社區。我們真正的敵人不是對我們不友善的人。我們真正的敵人是撒旦，他在這個墮落的世界中發揮影響力。耶穌清楚地告訴我們，世界會恨我們，因為它首先恨祂。如果我們不依靠神，我們就會被打敗。如果我們靠著自己，我們就會陷入試探。每天早上出門前，我們必須認定我們的元帥。你可以做一個簡短的禱告：「主耶穌，我再次向你宣誓效忠。我不知道我今天可能面臨什麼樣的爭戰。但我相信祢。求保護我，賜給我智慧和勇氣，成為祢忠誠的士兵。」

2. Take Away Your Senses 放下常理 (6:1-5, 10-11)

神吩咐約書亞脫掉鞋子。接下來神命令他放下常理。約書亞必須在主面前放下他的邏輯思考。他必須服從神的指示，縱使神的要求不太合理。請看 6:1-5，然後再讀 10-11 節。那是什麼計劃？神甚至不需要解釋為什麼那個方法管用。在這個時候，耶利哥的人民非常害怕。他們關閉城門以防止敵人進入，也防止逃兵離開。神告訴約書亞，祂已經把仇敵交在他手中。意味著必勝！如果我是約書亞，我會期望神接下來會提供詳細的戰略。至少有三種方法可以翻牆：爬梯子、挖隧道或用工具敲破它。但神要祂的子民繞城一共十三次。這完全不合邏輯。隊形是這樣的：一些拿兵器的人帶領隊伍，然後是七位吹號的祭司，再來是約櫃，最後是其他士兵。目的是什麼？當你看到一些敵人圍著你的城市繞圈子時，你會有什麼感覺？第一個反應可能是一頭暮水。他們到底在做什麼？除了號角聲之外沒有任何聲音，也沒有攻擊。之後，士兵們回到他們的基地。然後他們第二天重複同樣的過程。除了作為一種心理戰術外，它還可能是勸敵人投降的最後通牒。有些祭司吹號角。以色列人有兩種號角。其中之一是用銀製成的，它被用來發出警報或呼籲慶祝。這裡的號角是羊角，稱為羊角號。它們發出低沉而單調的聲音。在吹角節（利未記 23:23-25）期間，以色列人會吹號

角來呼籲人們悔改。因此，那個聲音提醒人神的恩典以及他們與神的關係。除了號角之外，另外一件器具是約櫃，它象徵著神的同在。用約櫃繞城表明神即將佔領該地區。因此，他們的遊行是一項宗教儀式。任何人看到都覺得毫無意義。神的計劃對我們來說也常常不合邏輯。對某些人來說，整個福音聽起來就像是一個童話故事。很難想像，神差遣祂的兒子來到世上，為了拯救我們，讓祂被釘死在十字架上。相信一個看不見的神也是不合邏輯的。主邀請我們透過禱告把我們的重擔交給祂。這是如何運作的？我們不知道！但結果證明禱告是有效的。神在大小事情上回應我們，我們的信心便不斷增長。耶穌告訴我們要先尋求神的國，然後神便會供應我們的需要。你相信那個應許嗎？那麼你為什麼把你的事業、金錢和孩子放在神之上？為什麼你忙於你的副業或嗜好以致沒有時間參加教會聚會？你為什麼要等到年底才投入你的金錢奉獻？當同工們討論教會事工時，我們過於擔心計劃、人力和金錢。但神問我們是否有足夠的禱告。我們得不到，是因為我們沒有向神求。神的計劃對祂來說是完全合理的。信靠並順服神，因為這是我們得到祂祝福的唯一途徑。

3. Take Over The Spoils 奪取勝利 (6:15-21)

約書亞脫下鞋子向神表示他的尊敬。他和所有的以色列人都必須放下他們的邏輯思維來聽從神的指示。他們確實順服神了。現在我們來到他們繞城的第七天。是時候奪取勝利了。我們繼續閱讀 **6:15-21**。祭司們發出了更大和更長的吹號聲，士兵們接著大聲呼喊。城牆隨之而倒塌。很可能神使用地震作為工具。他們隨後衝進去。約書亞清楚命令他們怎樣做。他們要殺死所有的人和動物。但是他們必須保留喇合和她的家人，以回報她隱藏兩個探子的恩惠。所有的貴金屬都歸給神，沒有人可以把任何東西據為己有。為什麼神要祂的子民宰殺所有的活物？我們經常被類似的經文困擾。我們要清楚，神並沒有要求以色列攻擊每個城市時都做相同的事。舊約中只有六次以色列人完全消滅所有的敵人。其次，我們要注意「當滅的物」這個形容。它的意思是「被指定要徹底破壞的東西」。約書亞在第 18 節的信息是：「不要拿任何要被徹底毀滅的東西，否則你和其他人也會被毀滅。」我們所知道一個貼切的類比是隔離。一個人必須被隔離兩週左右，直到他沒有新冠的症狀，以免他把病毒傳給別人。這裡的理由是所有屬於異教徒的東西都必須被清除。否則，它們會像瘟疫一樣污染以色列人的屬靈生活。申命記 **20:17-18** 是一段有幫助的參考經文：**17 只要照耶和華你神所吩咐的將這赫人、亞摩利人、迦南人、比利洗人、希未人、耶布斯人都滅絕淨盡，18 免得他們教導你們學習一切可憎惡的事，就是他們向自己神所行的，以致你們得罪耶和華你們的神。**那六個族群是應許之地的主要居民。神警告以色列人他們可能帶來的負面影響。不幸的是，神的子民不聽。於是拜偶像成為他們反復出現的問題。給我們的屬靈教訓是，我們必須對會絆倒我們信心

的人或事提高警覺。如果你在成為基督徒之前信奉別的宗教，你必須清除所有宗教物品。丟掉所有的神像、書籍和護身符。撒旦可以使用這些物品來攻擊你。如果一些朋友不斷邀請你去酒吧或賭場，那麼你必須對那些友誼做出正確的決定。沒有妥協的餘地。相反，你應該與一些成熟的基督徒交往並互相鼓勵。最終，以色列人佔領了耶利哥。它就像在一系列軍事行動中獻給神的初熟果子。神向他們保證，如果他們信靠祂，就必定會取得勝利。今天，我們屬靈的戰利品是什麼？我們的心應該是獻給神的第一份禮物。一切都從我們對神的委身開始。神的話語會改變我們，我們周圍的人也會注意到。神會先祝福我們和我們的家人，然後藉著我們祝福其他人。耶穌派我們出去為祂的國贏得靈魂，那些也是獻給神的屬靈戰利品。甚至在我們與他人分享福音之前，我們敬虔的榜樣就可以成為有效的見證工具。一切都從我們與神的個人關係開始。我們對神的心會影響我們的行為。沒有捷徑或神奇的步驟。

CONCLUSION 結論

神徵召以色列人和所有基督徒參加戰爭。真正的掙扎是勝過自我，使我們降服予主。唯有當我們聽從元帥的指示，我們才能得勝。勝利是靠信心取得的，而不是靠武力。耶穌基督為我們贏得了最終的戰爭。祂在十字架上打敗了撒旦，然後耶穌從死裡復活。當我們跟隨祂時，我們便能過得勝的生活。新的一年是新的開始。你有什麼大計劃嗎？我們的教會朝什麼方向前進？我們可以因著恐懼向敵人投降。那時，以色列人看到迦南人的城邑和城牆，都懼怕他們。他們不相信神。他們最終在曠野繞圈。我們作為個別信徒和教會整體可以重覆我們去年所做的事情。最後，我們只會是繞圈子。靠著神的恩典，我們必須做出一些革命性的改變。我有一些建議給你。請打開信封。裡面有兩張紙條，上面列出一些你可以考慮的具體行動。請不要現在填寫。我們今天應該有一段禱告時間。但我們今天不是要集體禱告，我會給你一些時間自己向神禱告。祈求神給你力量和決心去順服祂。我們禱告之後，你就可以用那個表格決定你希望在今年達成的事情。