

This past Friday marked the 19<sup>th</sup> year from the day that 19 Islamist terrorists coordinated four attacks against the United States by high jacking and using four different planes as suicide bombs – which resulted in 2,977 fatalities, over 25,000 disabling injuries, and substantial long-term health consequences, in addition to at least \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage. 9/11 is the single deadliest terrorist attack in human history and the single deadliest incident for firefighters and law enforcement officers in the history of the United States, with 343 and 72 killed, respectively. The impact of 9/11 went far beyond the US border. It changed the world and how we live our lives.

As we gather together today in the year 2020, we all once again find ourselves being attacked. Once again we face an enemy who has highjacked our lives and created a fearful atmosphere of turbulent chaos. And once again we are living in days of struggle and suffering that goes beyond our borders and out into all of the whole world. Those of us in North America are experiencing that painful attack through a toxic mix of issues. A deadly pandemic – whether you believe it or not - that has affected millions of people. Economic fragility. High unemployment rates. Stay-at-home orders. Racial unrest. Anger over what some perceive to be police brutality. Violent protests. Blatant political posturing. Countless new restrictions on our everyday lives regarding masks, social distancing, and handwashing. Incompetent leaders and rebellious, entitlement-minded followers. In these days we are also struggling and suffering from the effects of millions of acres of wildfires.

The most painful part about all of these things is, more often than not, when the enemy attacks us, our hearts will often get hard against God *because* He allowed pain to come into our lives, or our hearts can also often get hard against someone or something *because* they brought pain into our lives – from which then we find a self-absorbed reason to reject the life-giving principles of the Kingdom of God, which then gives us a self-absorbed reason to no longer respond to God. And those things are happening all around us, all of the time. We are living in days of fear mongering and violent chaos when more and more people are questioning and rejecting their faith in Christ.

But that’s not our calling. When we are called by God, and then we choose to join the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we’re automatically engaged with God in a painful, chaotic battle against the forces of sin and death and hell, which are the forces of Satan himself. It’s not just an occasional skirmish that we’re engaged in. We are in a pitched spiritual battle with satanic evil and with the world system, which is violently opposed to the advance of God’s kingdom on earth. Even within ourselves there is fleshly resistance to all the good things that God wants to do for us. Ephesians 6 makes very clear that the Christian life is one of painful, ongoing warfare: *“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm”* (Ephesians:6:10-13).

The Word of God makes frequent reference to the warfare that marks the life of God’s people. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, his son in the faith, *“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses”* (1 Timothy 6:12). Our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord is going to prompt opposition and struggle. At the end of his life as he awaited execution in a prison in Rome, Paul again wrote to Timothy, saying, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* (2 Timothy 4:7). Life as a born-again Christian of the Kingdom is a long life-long battle. Revelation 12 describes our Satanic enemy as *“the deceiver of the whole world,”* as *“the accuser of our brothers,”* as one who *“has come down to you in great wrath”* and as one who is *“furious”* (vs. 9, 10, 12, 17). His assaults are real, and a lifestyle of spiritual warfare is our calling as followers of Jesus.

This spiritual battle is going to be evident in Joshua 10, which is an account of the nation Israel's intense, sustained warfare against an alliance of five Amorite city-states that have attacked Gibeon, Israel's new covenant partner. Joshua 10 illustrates for us the challenge that Paul gives to Timothy: *"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him"* (2 Timothy 2:3-4). In our text for this morning God's Word will teach us what it means to be victorious soldiers, to be strong and courageous in the face of the enemies and to keep marching forward to claim the new territory that God wants us to take. In his farewell speech to Congress on April 19, 1951, U. S General Douglas MacArthur said, "In war there is no substitute for victory." Joshua would have agreed with that. I pray we would too.

*As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors. So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel." Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it. Joshua 10:1-5*

So the king of Jerusalem, Ado'ni-ze'dek, hears about the victories in Jericho and Ai and about this new alliance. Verse 2 says that *"he feared greatly"* because Gibeon is a strong city with a great army, and they should have been part of the alliance against the nation Israel. So he contacts these other four kings and has them join him. These kings that Ado'ni-ze'dek recruits are natural enemies who have spent most of their time fighting each other. But once the common enemy is identified in terms of the threat to the land, they immediately rally together. All five of these cities are within a thirty-mile radius of Gibeon, south and southwest of the city and the attack on Gibeon begins. Here we see that when we have chosen to follow Jesus - we are a threat to those who oppose His kingdom.

*And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us." So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. Joshua 10:6-10*

Here we read that the men of Gibeon look across the Judean hills and they see all these armies coming to lay siege against their city. They send messengers down the hill to Gilgal and the call out for help: *"Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us."* Joshua immediately gathers the troops, and led them toward the battle. He could do so because God had told Joshua: *"Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you."* Joshua has heard those words from the Lord before, when he was anticipating the battle at Jericho and then the second battle at Ai. The text here tells us that, having marched all night uphill, they carry out a surprise attack at dawn. They rout the enemy, and the Amorites flee in a panic. The Israeli army experience a partial victory there at Gibeon, but then they have to pursue the fleeing troops down through this mountain pass at Beth-horon. Praise God that He keeps His word! Praise God that He keeps us promise to always be with us – whether it be in good times or times of trouble, throughout all our days of battle.

*And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword. At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel. So Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal. Joshua 10:11-15*

In verse 11 the battle unfolds as Israel chases them through the valley of Aijalon. It's there that we see sovereign power of God at work to protect and empower His chosen people to win the victory over His and our enemies as: *"The LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword."* God's provision goes beyond the physical material resources of our natural existence. He is willing to use supernatural resources to achieve His sovereign purposes. This is not about miracles on demand. This is about sovereign decisions on God's part to reverse the natural order of his creation for his honor and glory, for the cause of His victory in His kingdom on earth.

In the miracle of the hailstones, we see God assisting an army that is weary. These men had hiked all night, twenty-five miles uphill; engaged in hand-to-hand combat through most of the day; and then pursued the Amorite army, which was in flight, down through this narrow mountain pass. And so God providentially sends in reinforcements of heavenly artillery, machine-gun fire of hailstones. These hailstones are sort of like the "smart" bombs we see in warfare today, which can identify which targets to hit. The hailstones hit only Amorite soldiers, never Israelite soldiers. But the miracle of hailstones is nothing compared to the miracle of extending the daylight hours so Israel can secure a complete victory over their enemies. If nightfall came, it would be easy for the enemy to escape. And so Joshua prayed to God for help and God hears Joshua's cry to reverse the natural order of creation and the Spirit of God empowered Joshua to proclaim the battle cry: *"Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon."* And the Creator of the universe went to work: *"And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies."*

Throughout the ages, and even today, many have tried to explain how this divine miracle could have happened. How did God stop the earth on its axis and also stop the moon in its orbit? Well, for that matter, how do we explain any miracle? The biblical answer is: "faith in God." God says through the prophet Jeremiah, *"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?"* (Jeremiah 32:27.) The Lord of the universe is in control over all of the natural elements. In Psalm 74 Asaph declares to God: *"Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter."* Everything God has created is His servant. He rules and reigns over all His supernatural resources.

There are some who will hear this and respond by saying, "It's easy to say that God rules and reigns over all His supernatural resources, when He performed a miracle for the people back in those days, but we don't see God doing those kinds of things today? Does God still suspend the natural laws that He put in place?" The answer is: "Yes!" He is doing supernatural miracles all the time! But, we don't see them *because* - we are not asking or looking for them *because* - we are too preoccupied with ourselves and with what's going on in our own lives - rather than being preoccupied living for the God who supernaturally created us from dust - and then God supernaturally saved us by sending Jesus Christ to die on a cross for our sins in our place and raising him from the dead - so we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored back to God forever. This is the sovereign power of God at work to supernaturally to protect and empower His chosen people to win the victory over His and our enemies.

*These five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. And it was told to Joshua, "The five kings have been found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave and set men by it to guard them, but do not stay there yourselves. Pursue your enemies; attack their rear guard. Do not let them enter their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand." When Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished striking them with a great blow until they were wiped out, and when the remnant that remained of them had entered into the fortified cities, then all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah. Not a man moved his tongue against any of the people of Israel.*

*Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me from the cave." And they did so, and brought those five kings out to him from the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near; put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." And afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees. And they hung on the trees until evening. But at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day. Joshua 10:16-27*

Here we read that Joshua finds out that the five kings have escaped and are holed up in a cave. In the culture of the day this was a cowardly, almost treasonous act that these kings could have committed. They abandoned their troops, ran together to protect their own lives, and hid in this cave. Joshua tells his men to leave them in the cave so they can finish the battle. At the end of the battle, Joshua performs a public ceremony of pulling the kings out of the cave and having his generals put their feet on the neck of each king. This ceremony was done in those days to give encouragement and strength to his soldiers. The victories that they have accomplished at Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon have given them control of the central part of the land of Canaan. They still have, ahead of them, a difficult, extended campaign of battles. Joshua's military strategy of dividing and conquering has worked. But with more battles to fight, Joshua wants to remind the troops that the Lord is going to continue to give them victory throughout the land. So the actions of Joshua in executing these five kings contain powerful symbolism for the nation and for us today: completed warfare against our enemies and the guarantee of future victory over our enemies.

This is a spiritual principle that appears throughout the Scriptures. King Solomon, speaking of his father David's success against the enemies of Israel, talks about a time when the Lord put David's foes "*under the soles of his feet.*" (1 Kings 5:3). David himself saw his military victories as the promise of a day when God would make his own enemies "*his footstool*" through the spiritual victory of the coming Messiah (Psalm 110:1). The apostle Paul picks up the same phrase, referring to Jesus Christ's ultimate victory over sin in 1 Corinthians 15:25: "*For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*" This is the kind assurance of victory we need in battles of our lives.

This *victory* answers the deepest question of our hearts, which Paul asks in Romans 8:35: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*" That list of struggles defines life as it really is. We are never told that we won't have difficulty. In Christ we are engaged in a spiritual battle to the death. But the answer to Paul's question says that Jesus Christ is the ultimate Victor: "*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (8:37-39). Jesus won't just protect us or preserve us. He will also give us absolute, complete victory. The one who supernaturally stilled the sun and stopped the moon will give us victory in the battles of life. All kings will be executed.

Victory means putting the enemy to death. There is something in us that resists that necessity. Most of us are uncomfortable with execution. We ask, "Wouldn't it be better just to publicly humiliate the kings or make them spend the rest of their lives in the cave or just parole them to Gilgal? Why execute them?" Well, Joshua does not only execute them, he also hangs them on a tree for a day to show that they are under God's curse. Then he has their bodies put back in the cave, and he has a monument built to stand for all generations. It had to be this way because the kings were in violent opposition to God's work in that land, and if they weren't destroyed, they would come back to try to conquer the nation again. The Amorites had been in violent opposition to Israel since the days of Abraham. The time for mercy and grace is past for these men and their followers. It isn't enough to leave them skulking in a cave. They had to be slain. We shouldn't pity these kings at all.

In a similar way, what we're called to do is examine the cave of our own thought life, the things nobody else may know about, and ask ourselves, "What things that are in resistance to God's will and purpose are still loitering in my life? What are the fleshly, destructive tendencies that I ignore that could very well be attached to evil? How is the enemy of my soul planning to undermine who I'm called to be in Christ?" Brothers and sisters, we must be willing to submit to the crucifixion of *self* if we want to enjoy the complete victory in Jesus Christ. We can't leave sin lurking in the hidden recesses of our heart, without its being brought into the light and judged. The good news is that if we face whatever "kings" are committed to pulling the rug out from under our walk with Jesus Christ - we will know forgiveness, empowerment, cleansing, and direction for life. Jesus, Savior and King, is the one who defeats our enemies as they rise up - whether it's the fleshly things in us that resist God, or the influence of a world system that doesn't like what we stand for in relationship to God. With the risen Jesus Christ, it's guaranteed that we can live in victory over all those things.

*As for Makkedah, Joshua captured it on that day and struck it, and its king, with the edge of the sword. He devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho. Joshua 10:28*

At Makkedah Joshua begins his battle campaign to eradicate the enemies of God and God's people. After he did so we read of a series of battles with seven different cities in the south unfolds. Each battle gets only one or two verses. But between each battle are action connectives - they moved, they went, they traveled; continuing the work of conquest. Each individual battle is violent and intense. It is significant that two things are mentioned in verses 28-42: First, the Lord gave the victory, and second, Joshua did everything God commanded him to. Joshua carried out warfare God's way.

*So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal. Joshua 10:40-42*

These three verses summarize Jacob's southern campaign. He defeated all the enemies in the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. And Joshua was able to take all these kings and all their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for God's people and God's people obeyed their God.

The very last verse of the chapter is quiet and reflective: *“Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.”* This is the fifth time Gilgal is mentioned. Gilgal is a place of reference throughout our chapter. Gilgal is the place Israel started the attack from and the place they return to. Gilgal is a spiritual base camp that they come back to. Remember, Gilgal is the place where Joshua set up the stones as a memorial of the nation's crossing through the Jordan River, a symbol of death to the wilderness life and of resurrection life in the new land. Gilgal was the place of circumcision, where the reproach, shame, and humiliation of the past was symbolically rolled away. Gilgal was the place where Passover was re-instituted, which represented intimate fellowship with the Lord. Gilgal was the place where the people began to live off the provision of the land instead of depending on the miraculous provision of manna. Gilgal was the place where God showed up in front of Joshua with sword in hand, *“the commander of the army of the LORD,”* and Joshua fell on his face in worship and submission before him. Gilgal was the base camp they came back to after their humiliation at Ai and Gilgal is the base camp they came to after the victory at Ai.

And now these weary soldiers, probably after weeks in the south of the land, return home. Imagine how good those tents must have looked, and their wives and children. We as Christians need a Gilgal that we can return to, a place of rest and renewal. Gilgal has great community significance. It's a sanctuary where God's people gather to hear his word. Gilgal reminds us that our warfare is not fought in isolation. We are fellow soldiers in the fight. We gather together as the church partly so that we can hear war stories that encourage us, strengthen us, and give us strategy for how we can fight the battle. We need those stories. Throughout the conquest of Canaan, Israel returns over and over to this very significant place. There they find encouragement, rest, motivation, and strategy for continued warfare. Like Gilgal, our getting together at church on Sunday morning, in homes, and wherever we gather as the body of Christ - ought to be times of rest, worship, spiritual encouragement and empowerment for a life of warfare through God's word. Gathering together at Gilgal in the midst of the battles of our lives makes us right with God and one another.

The Christian life has its roots firmly imbedded in Calvary, the place where we died with Jesus and rose with Him, where we deliberately renounced carnality and have entered into a living fellowship with our Lord, where we have begun to take the strong food of His Word, and to realize every moment of our lives that the Captain of the Lord's hosts is with us.

Brothers and sisters – We desperately need Gilgal in the days we live in. While these days might seem to be troubled and chaotic – know that God is at the bottom of everything that is going on in our lives and all throughout the world. In Isaiah 45:7 God declares: *“I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.”* Because our Lord *“does all these things”* – “we can take heart” that in the midst of the battles we face in life.

When we are called by God and join the family of God through faith in Christ, we're automatically engaged with God in a painful, chaotic battle against the forces of sin and death and hell, which are the forces of Satan himself. But in the midst of the battle, we are called to go to Gilgal. In John 16:33 Jesus said: *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* Amen.

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