



Sermon Series

Praying Our Way to Pentecost

Jericho Walls

Matthew 6:33 (NIV) *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

In this scripture, we see that when we take action by seeking God first and putting Him in the primary position in our lives, God's promise follows. The promise that every single priority that falls underneath the priority of God will be taken care of like only God can do. What is your priority list? For example, God first, then marriage, then family, then job, then relationships, etc.

If you are going to seek God first, there are a couple of things that are not negotiable. The first thing is that we spend daily time in God's Word. It is a book that I highly recommend. The whole idea is that in being in the Word, you allow God to speak to you through the pages of the Bible, often directly applying to your situation or circumstance. The second thing is daily prayer which we will look at more in depth.

Praying and Persevering in Bold Prayers

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV) *6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Let's be real. God is telling us to not be anxious in our prayers. Some of us are in trouble already, myself included. We are challenged to drop the walls down, chill out, relax and understand we've got work to do. Don't miss the part "with thanksgiving." It is not a fear and trepidation prayer. Thanksgiving helps us with

our anxiousness and helps us understand that God's got this. That leads us to verse 7 which says, if we pray with thanksgiving, we will experience God's peace. You might wonder, what is different about God's peace? His peace is more than positive thinking, which is good, but God's peace is more. It's not the absence of conflict. Even with God's peace, there can be conflict. It's more than good feelings, good vibes, and warm fuzzies. We like those things, but God's peace is different. It is the peace in knowing that God is in control. That's a game changer and a life changer. God's peace will empower you, encourage you, remind you, and challenge you to put first things first. Seek God first and He'll be with you in all those priorities you place after Him and with that you will have peace. The kind of peace that says God knows what He's doing. Even when I scratch my head and I don't know what to do, I trust Him and I believe He knows best.

I've been rereading *The Circle Maker* by Mark Batterson. It's an intriguing book. It's about praying circles around your biggest dreams and greatest fears. I've always believed in the power of prayer and have seen it modeled by great role models in my life. I watched my father-in-law and saw how he pastored and prayed. Also, the first pastor I worked for closed his office door for two hours every morning because he aggressively went after prayer requests and needs, taking them to God. All these things have inspired me to face the challenges in the days ahead by praying bold prayers and persevering in prayer no matter what. Have I prayed bold prayers before? Yes. Have I persevered in prayer? Sometimes, but not like I'd like and I'm probably not alone.

Right now, I am personally dealing with my human tendency to freak out and God reminding me that He is in control. My mom has been dealing with several health issues. She and I do not live in the same state which is challenging in and of itself. Last week, she was dealing with a major infection which was causing some mental and physical problems. The phone conversations I was having with her were confusing and I just wanted to fix it. Should I get a plane ticket to go or could my brother go? I'd wake up in the middle of the night and pray, going to God and asking Him to intervene. I'm a long way away and not exactly sure what to do. Finally, four days into the infection, the antibiotic won. Her mental confusion and physical symptoms began to subside. During this time, I was

praying and many others were too, but I still wanted to control. I struggled with all the human feelings of wanting to be a good son, worrying about my mom and the anxiety that I know I'm not supposed to have. You've been there. It crossed my mind that this was a great reminder of the power of prayer and how God works. I couldn't control the situation, but I could go boldly to God. I didn't know exactly how the answer to my prayers was going to turn out, but I could trust Him. I didn't hear an audible voice, but I clearly heard God reminding me to chill and I experienced that peace that just understands. I relinquished control and trusted God.

Facing the Walls of Jericho

Here's where the Jericho walls come into play. In the book *The Circle Maker*, the march around the Jericho walls is the backdrop of the book where God delivered on His 400-year promise. Some of you are like, really? 400 years? Is that how long it takes? No, not usually, so don't be discouraged. The promise starts with Abraham in Genesis 15 and then is confirmed several times throughout the Old Testament. While the Jericho story in Joshua 6 doesn't explicitly mention the Israelites taking the position of prayer, I have no doubt that the Israelites were praying as they circled the city. Isn't that what we do when we face challenges beyond our abilities? Can you imagine that first glance of the skyline of Jericho? The Children of Israel had been wandering in the desert for 40 years and are now entering the Promised Land. I wonder if they felt small. Remember back in Numbers 12 when Moses sent out the twelve spies? They were supposed to scout out the Promised Land and come back with an evaluation. They came back with, what I call, the ultimate church vote. The church board voted ten to two not to advance. The two who said, "Yes, we can do this with God's help," were Joshua and Caleb. The other ten said, "We can't do this. They're going to squash us like grasshoppers. The people and cities are huge!" They pay the consequence. They wander for 40 years because of this vote. They now understand, as they see this walled city, why some of those spies might have freaked out. The lower wall was six feet high. That's not too impressive. But, the upper wall was around 50 feet high and in this ancient metropolis, it would have seemed overwhelming. The Children of Israel looked at what God had promised

and it seemed impossible. The way God told them to take the city seemed nonsensical.

Let's get real about this. Have you ever been up against a situation or circumstance that seems overwhelming or impossible? You feel small. You feel like the grasshopper. It's too big, too painful. You feel powerless and maybe, that it might just be the first thing that has ever been too hard for God. Let me remind you of the details around what these people were supposed to do to win this battle and watch the "walls come tumbling down." Take note that these are God's detailed instructions. He is the power behind the obedience.

Joshua 6:1-7a,10-11,14-16,20 (NIV) ¹ Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. ² Then the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in." ⁶ So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." ⁷ And he ordered the army, "Advance!

¹⁰ But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" ¹¹

So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

¹⁴ So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. ¹⁵ On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. ¹⁶ The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!..." ²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

I imagine that first lap must have felt strange, but with each circle, a holy confidence was building in their souls. By the seventh day, their faith must have been ready to pop. They arose before dawn, started their circle at 6:00 am and at 3 miles per hour they would have taken their seventh lap by 9:00 a.m. In keeping with God's instructions, they hadn't said a word in six days. They had been silently circling. Then the priests sounded their horns and simultaneously the shout followed. 600,000 Israelites raised a holy roar that must have registered on the Richter scale and the walls came down.

After seven days of circling Jericho, God delivered on a 400 year promise. He proved, once again, that His promises don't have expiration dates. Jericho stands and falls as a testament to the simple truth, if you keep circling the promise, God will ultimately deliver on it in His own way and in His own time.

So, what is your Jericho? What miracle are you marching around?

More than a thousand years later, another miracle takes place near Jericho.

Matthew 20:29-34 (NIV) ²⁹ *As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.* ³⁰ *Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"* ³¹ *The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"* ³² *Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.* ³³ *"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."* ³⁴ *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*

Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The Disciples think it is a human interruption, but Jesus sees a divine appointment. He asks the blind men, "What do you want me to do for you?" He forced them to define their need, to spell it out. He wanted to make sure they knew what they wanted. Jesus asks us the same question, "What do you want Jesus to do for you?" He wants us to boldly go to Him with details. Can you spell

out the promises, the miracles, the dreams that God has put on your heart? Most of us would freak out. If we can't answer, we are as blind spiritually as the two men in the story were physically. This could be the reason why our prayers seem pretty boring to us. If you are falling asleep during your prayers, there may be a problem. If your mind is wandering all over the place, there may be a problem. If your prayers are general and wide open, there may be a problem. That's why our prayers aren't just boring to us; they are uninspiring to God. If faith is being sure of what we hope for, then being unsure of what we hope for is the antithesis of faith. Well-developed faith results in well-defined prayers and well-defined prayers result in a well-lived life. What do you want God to do? Start with the promises like we read in Matthew 6:33 and Philippians 4:6-7. Take time to think and pray through some God glorifying life goals. Keep a journal. Define your Jericho.

What is your Jericho?

Jericho is spelled many different ways. If you have cancer, it is spelled healing. If you have a family member who is far from God, it is called salvation. If your marriage is falling apart, it is called reconciliation. If you have a vision beyond your resources, it is spelled provision. Jericho might be someone's name, like for me, it's my children's names.

A pastor of a huge church in Seoul, Korea wrote this, "God does not answer vague prayers." Get specific as you are circling and praying for your Jericho. You can walk with a holy confidence that the blessing of God and His promises are sure. Let's have a definitive answer to the question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Let's seek God, His kingdom, and His righteousness and then be obedient and give God all the glory! This should change the way we pray for the challenges that are facing us today.