

Believing God For The Impossible

Joshua 10:1-15

On June 6, 1944, 160,000 Allied troops landed along 50 miles of heavily-defended French coastline near Normandy to fight the forces of Nazi Germany. General Eisenhower had said that this operation was one in which “we will accept nothing less than full victory.” More than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft were involved in the operation. It is now known as D-Day, and by the time it was over, more than 9,000 Allied soldiers had lost their lives, but taking Normandy ultimately meant the defeat of Hitler.

Cornelius Ryan wrote a book in 1959 about D-Day, and he called it “The Longest Day.” The book takes its name from a quote by Erwin Rommel, German Field Marshal of World War II, who said “...the first 24 hours of the invasion will be decisive...the fate of Germany depends on the outcome...for the Allies, as well as Germany, it will be the longest day.” Since the day would be hard and difficult, it would *seem* like a very... long... day.

We come today to the tenth chapter of Joshua, where there really *was* a long day, and not just because it seemed that way. Joshua realized at one point in the battle that the day was going to end before the victory was complete, so he simply asked God to make the sun stand still. And the Bible tells us at the end of verse thirteen that “*The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.*”

Many have attempted to explain what happened that day. Some have said that Joshua was just confused, or that this was mere poetic expression, or even that what actually happened was that the sky was cloudy, so it wasn't as hot. It's kind of baffling the lengths people will go to sometimes to explain away the miracles of the Bible. In the late 1960s there was even a story circulated claiming that scientists had discovered a missing day in the history of the solar system, which could be explained in part by Joshua 10. The scientists were either at NASA or at Yale, depending on the version. It's still being circulated today, thanks to email and the Internet. But there is no basis to that story, and we Christians need to be careful not to believe something just because we see it in an email.

We need to be careful, in our attempts to understand this event, that we don't say something that the Bible doesn't say. So understanding that, let me tell you that my faith is a pretty simple faith, and if the Bible says that the sun stood still so the Israelites could complete the victory, then I believe it. My curiosity leads me to

read about it and wonder if it happened this way or that way, but in the end, I believe it happened exactly the way the Bible says it did.

Now before you scoff, let me point out to you that perhaps you already believe other things that are just as fantastic: God creating the universe by speaking it into existence; God speaking to Moses from a bush that burned and yet was not consumed; the Red Sea parting so the Israelites could cross over on dry ground; Naaman, healed of leprosy; Mary, giving birth, though she was a virgin; Lazarus, raised from the dead; the blind, seeing; the deaf, hearing; the lame, walking. And if you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead after three days, and if you believe that our sins can be washed away and we can be made clean and whole, you already believe something far more incredible than what we read about in Joshua 10.

And here's why: God is certainly able to do what He wants with the universe He spoke into existence. Our own knowledge is too limited for us to say with certainty that He could *not* make the earth stop in its rotation. Both day and night belong to Him, as we read in Psalm 74:16-17, "*The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.*" So why could He *not* command them? We read in Genesis that God commanded the sun and moon to *shine*, and even *when*—if we truly believe that, why would we be tripped up when we read in Joshua 10 that God commanded them *not* to move?

And more than once we are told in the Scriptures, "*For nothing is impossible with God*" (Luke 1:37). "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible,*" Jesus said once (Matthew 19:26) and He was talking about a human being entering the kingdom of heaven. So we're just going to assume that when the Bible says that the sun stood still in the sky, that's exactly what happened.

But it's also true that there are times in our lives today that we need God to do something that seems impossible to us. It might be a relationship that needs to be mended, or a job that needs to be secured. It might be a financial situation that needs to be turned around, or even joy and peace restored to a heart in conflict. Whatever your situation is today for which you need God to intervene, take hope and courage from what we read in Joshua 10.

When you need God to do the impossible...

1 Honor your commitments, vv. 6-7

You will remember that in chapter nine, the Gibeonites had deceived Joshua and the Israelites into thinking that they had come from a great distance.

Otherwise, the Gibeonites were in danger of being destroyed, just as Jericho and Ai had been. Joshua and his men fell for it, and made a treaty with the Gibeonites. Three days later, though, they discovered they had been deceived.

It was too late, though, to go back on their promise. Joshua 9:19 reads, *“We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now.”* So instead, they made them servants to the people of Israel. From then on, the Gibeonites would be the ones who would chop wood and haul water for all the sacrifices which would be made at the tabernacle.

But the day fast arrived when Joshua was going to have to defend the very ones who previously had been enemies. Chapter ten opens with the formation of a confederacy among the Canaanite kings in the area, led by Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem. Hearing that the Gibeonites had made a treaty with Joshua caused them to be very much alarmed, because Gibeon was an important city with a strong army. So Adoni-Zedek arranged for an alliance between himself and four other kings, to go up and attack Gibeon.

Gibeon was strong, but there was no way they could withstand an attack by five other armies! So in verse six they sent word to Joshua: *“Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us.”* The word “save” means “to deliver” and here is what is called an emphatic imperative—in other words, this was as close to a command as it could be, and it had a sense of extreme urgency. “You MUST come to deliver us” is the sense of what they were saying.

Now Joshua could have seen this as an easy way out, as an answer to his earlier dilemma. He could have said, “They got themselves into this mess. Let them figure it out.” But that’s not what he did. There was not even a hint of hesitation on Joshua’s part. The Gibeonites sent for him because they were in danger. They relied on the covenant, the treaty, the word that Joshua had given them.

That is why we read in verse seven *“So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men.”* He not only honored the commitment but he did so personally, and he gave it the best he had.

When you and I need God to do the impossible in our lives, it is vital that we do what we say we are going to do, that we fulfill our obligations and responsibilities. When we are faced with obstacles which seem to be insurmountable, we need to know that through the entire duration of the challenge, God expects us to be men and women of integrity.

2 Believe God's Promises, v. 8

Verse eight gives us a little behind-the-scenes information that we need to know when we look at this story: *"The Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.'"* When you see that with your heart, you begin to understand how Joshua could go up against all five armies at one time with such confidence. You begin to see how Joshua could believe God for the impossible.

We have the same advantage. In fact, we have a greater advantage, because we have the complete Bible, containing all those hundreds and hundreds of *"very great and precious"* promises (2 Peter 1:4) from God Himself, not the least of which is eternal life (1 John 2:25). When we are going up against "five armies" at once, we need to lean back on and fully trust in the promises God has already given us. We don't need new promises—just turn to the Scriptures and soak in the words God has already given us.

"A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all" (Psalm 34:19). That's a promise! *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all"* (2 Corinthians 4:17). That's a promise! *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). That's a promise!

When we're in the heat of the battle of life, and we really need God to do the impossible, we need to block out the other voices of turmoil which shout inside our heads and hearts, and rely more completely on the promises of God. They have not changed one tiny bit since He first gave them to us.

3 Use your head, v. 9

Verse nine tells us *"after an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise."* The attacking armies perhaps thought that Joshua would back out of his treaty with Gibeon, once he saw what he was up against. Then if he dared oppose them, he was certainly too far away to do much good. It would

take him too long to get there, so they had plenty of time to annihilate the Gibeonites. But Joshua surprised them by not only coming to fight, but by arriving at dawn—a great, time-tested military strategy.

God had said “*I’ve given them into your hand,*” and Joshua was going to have to accept that by faith, because he had no other evidence. He lived out the truth that we read in Hebrews 11:1, “*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*” But that didn’t mean that Joshua shouldn’t use his head to figure out what his role was in the situation, and how best to go about it.

Growing up, whenever my brothers and I did or said something a little less than intelligent, Dad would say, “Boys, God gave you a brain—use it!” We even found ourselves repeating that to each other and sometimes to ourselves when we were faced with a challenge, or when we had committed some faux pas. “God gave you a brain—use it!”

So I guess that’s one reason why my whole attitude about being in a position where I need God to do something includes the idea that there may be some things I need to think through and analyze. I believe God intends us to work through some things and think through some things. We need to understand that faith and intelligence are not necessarily enemies, that just because you believe by faith something to be true does not mean automatically that you can’t work it out logically.

And while human reasoning has its limitations, we should not be afraid of it. We as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should never be afraid of thinking. There may be some things we can only believe through faith. But that doesn’t mean that we cannot use the common sense that our Creator gave us. You will not find a verse anywhere in Scripture which tells us that we are to suspend all thinking and human intelligence when it comes to dealing with our problems.

When you need God to do the impossible, it may be that He wants you to sit down and apply some intelligence to the situation, as Joshua did in marching all night to catch them by surprise. Use your head.

4 Work with God, vv. 10-11

Verse nine tells us that God told Joshua that He had given the Canaanite confederacy into their hands. So Joshua was aware of what God’s purpose was. He knew, by faith, that the end result would be victory for the Israelites. But he also knew that he could not expect victory if he did not participate!

Joshua knew that he could not just sit back in his tent and say, “I just believe God is going to give us the victory! I just believe God is going to give us the victory! God is going to do this for us!” He knew that there was something he had to do.

And when we look at verse ten, we see the Lord and the Israelites working together. *“The Lord threw them [the Canaanites] into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah.”* God *“threw them into confusion”* and the Israelites *“pursued”* them.

Then in verse eleven, we see more of this cooperative effort between God and His people. The Lord *“hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky,”* with the result that *“more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.”* So while the Lord killed many of them with hailstones, some of them did in fact die by the sword of the Israelite soldiers.

One detail here that is not immediately noticeable is to be found in the opening words of verse eleven: *“As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah...”* The town of Beth Horon was north of Gibeon, and the town of Azekah was south of Gibeon—they were fleeing from before God and the Israelites in every direction!

The point which jumps out here is that the Lord did His part, and the Israelites did their part. They had to work together. Certainly God could have done all this by Himself, as He had done with the Egyptian army. But even then Moses and the people had to do their part by walking through the bed of the Red Sea. We can see this same principle at work whenever there is a miracle to be had. In 1 Kings 17, the widow who had no food, and was about to die, was told by Elijah to gather up all the jars she could, and when she did, God filled them with flour and oil.

It’s not that God needs us, of course, but in His wisdom and knowledge He has chosen to do it this way. There are things God can do alone, but He chooses that we should be a part of it. Therefore, there are things which will never be done unless we do it. There are some areas in which God has told us that we are to be involved; there are some things He wants us to do; there are some tasks reserved for us—not Him. When we work in partnership with God, amazing things happen.

5 Pray audacious prayers, vv. 12-14

The battle obviously was going in their favor. With the Lord raining down hailstones on them, the combined forces of the Canaanites were fleeing in every direction, and the soldiers of Israel were pursuing them. However, Joshua could see that though victory was certainly within their grasp, the day would end before the victory was complete.

So Joshua prayed an audacious prayer. Joshua prayed that the sun and the moon would stand still, to give the Israelites time to complete the victory. Some might say this was foolhardy or rash. But when we look at the result of this prayer, we know that it was bold. It was daring. But it was a prayer based on the fact that God had already told Joshua at the end of verse eight, *“Not one of them will be able to withstand you.”*

And it was a prayer based on Joshua’s experience with God in the past. Joshua had been there when God sent the plagues on Egypt. Joshua saw Moses stretch out his arm and part the waters of the Red Sea so the entire body of Israelites could cross over on dry ground. He had watched in holy fear as the entire Egyptian army drowned in the water as it returned to its place. He had lived on the manna which God provided for His people in the wilderness, apparently a perfect food, as they needed nothing else. Joshua had seen Almighty God stop the waters of the flooded Jordan River so they could cross over. He had felt the ground rumble beneath his feet as the fortified walls of Jericho fell. Joshua knew what God could do, so his prayer was bold. It was *audacious!*

You can see the point of this story in verse fourteen: *“There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord”* –did what? Threw hailstones from the sky and killed the enemy without even putting a scratch on the Israelites? Or even caused the sun and moon to stand still and not go down until the battle was over? No, that’s not what it says. It says *“There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man.”*

The most exciting aspect of this story is that God heard the prayer of a mere man, and answered him. So today, God hears our prayers and answers us.

Do you need to see God do something awesome, even impossible, in your life? You’re never going to see it by praying bland, mild, weak, impotent little prayers. The hand of God never moves in response to a request prayed by someone who barely believes in Him. God moves in response to His people who have experience with Him, who know what He can do, who believe that He is sovereign and

powerful. God hears the cries of His people when they are serious and fervent, even passionate, in their praying.

You see, audacious praying honors God because it says that we actually do believe that He is a powerful God, and that His promises are true.

The Bible itself teaches us to pray these kinds of audacious prayers. *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him* (1 John 5:14-15). You see, when we need God to do the impossible, we can pray audacious prayers, but not because we deserve an answer. The Bible is very clear about that. When we ask God for something bold, it's not because we deserve to be heard. We certainly **don't** deserve God to pay any attention to us at all, much less do the thing we ask.

Psalm 84:11 reads, *“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”* Is that true or not? Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7:11, *“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”* Is that true or not? You see, we can pray audacious prayers because we believe what the Scriptures tell us.

In St. Peter, Missouri, Terry Sanderson is the pastor of Calvary Church. He has written on his church's website:

“I have to admit that for the longest time I avoided bold prayers at all cost because I was afraid how God might answer them. I didn't want to pray for patience fearing that God would "stick" me with an irritating person. I didn't want to pray for love lest I experience betrayal. I didn't want to pray for the salvation of someone because God may ask me to be the one to share with them. Safe prayers were a lot easier. God didn't have to work in me. He just had to change someone else.

“But Jesus did not come to make our life safe, easy and predictable. He invites us into a dynamic adventure with Him. And now I pray more boldly asking the Lord to challenge me, change me and use me. There is nothing like seeing God answer those.

“Imagine what it would be like for a church to pray boldly and to mean it. Imagine a church on its knees imploring God to use them. Imagine a church that says we

don't want to be safe or predictable. We want to see the power of God at work in us.”

And then this pastor made a startling comment, “We could be that church.”

We could be that church!

When you need God to do the impossible, you start out by honoring the commitments you've made. You don't back out because it's difficult. He will not honor you in the situation you're in if you are not honest about your responsibilities. Second, be sure you believe God's promises. They're all true, not just a few of them here and there. Third, use your head. God is not afraid of you when you use your own logic and reasoning to work toward a conclusion.

Fourth, work with God, partnering with Him to achieve a solution. God may be waiting to accomplish the impossible in your life until you decide to pitch in and work with Him. And fifth, pray big, bold, audacious prayers. You and I honor Him when we pray like that.

When you need God to do the impossible, take a stand on your faith and on the Word of God. Believe!