

March 10 –

Rolling Away Disgrace

Scripture -

“The LORD said to Joshua, ‘Today I have rolled away the disgrace of Egypt from you.’ [Joshua 5:9].

The people of Israel were living in disgrace. They were living in perpetual bondage and oppression, continual defeat. Suffering in mistreatment, their hope was almost dried up. They cried out to God, but it had been many generations, and no change had come.

Then God sent Moses, the Deliverer. Ten Plagues convinced Pharaoh to release them. The Red Sea parted. The Pillar of Cloud or Fire led them through the wilderness. But, total vindication would be complete when they entered their new home, the Promised Land. God very publicly delivered his people. It was clear that God’s power worked miraculously for them. God neither forgot, nor rejected them. Nor does he forget you.

“I have rolled away the disgrace.”

Disgrace. One definition is “a shame or loss of respect arising from bad behavior.”

Tiger Woods knows public disgrace. The world listened to his confession. National politicians, TV preachers, Movie stars --- many know the tremendous shame of public humiliation when their private moral failures become public knowledge.

However, it isn’t just the “mighty” who fall. Remember the scripture, “All have sinned and *fallen* short of the glory of God” [Romans 3:23]? I too know disgrace.

Isaiah writes of the Suffering Servant, “Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrow, and the Lord God laid on him the iniquity of us all.” [Isaiah 53:4]. I believe that Jesus is the crucified Messiah, the Servant King, who fulfilled this prophecy for us. On the cross, Jesus lifted our guilt and shame and carried it away. He removed our disgrace.

On Easter morning, God rolled away the stone in front of the tomb. Jesus not only rolls away our disgrace, he breaks the cycle of our defeat. He opens the way to new beginnings. God shows his greatest power in the forgiveness which redefines our lives.

We will still fall. But our moments of defeat do not define our identity. We no longer walk under a cloud of shame. Our new name is “forgiven” and “beloved.” We will not walk in disgrace, but rather shine with his grace.

Prayer –

“Lord God, thank you for the cross of Jesus, where by his death Christ removed the cloud of disgrace from us. Give us faith to believe. Empower us to live as people of the light, shining with your love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

March 11 –

Rock Pile

Scripture

“Take twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place you stay tonight.”

Joshua 4:3

In any rural area, if you see a rock pile at the end of the field, you know that the farmer has been busy picking up rock to clear his field so the crops can grow and no damage happens to the machinery.

But this rock pile has an entirely different purpose. The river does not need the rocks cleared to flow swiftly past. This rock pile is a visual reminder of God’s supernatural creation of a crossing place into the Promised Land. This visual rock pile is to stimulate gratitude and worship, and to stir curiosity in the young. The rock pile is an altar.

I had a seminary professor, Sheldon Tostengard, who said, “When I attend children’s Christmas pageants, and I see girls and boys with angel wings fastened to their backs, dressed in bath robes as shepherds with dish towels around their heads, I remember so much.” The visual re-enactment triggers a re-telling of the historic event. As the story is told, faith is rekindled. Our identity as God’s people is an ongoing tapestry of God’s love and deliverance. And the story continues in our lives.

The instructions for the rock pile called God’s people to pause and celebrate God’s great blessing. They were to mark the moment. They were to pause to worship, acknowledging the hand of God actively in the events. In their worship, they praised God for victory and for leading the way.

When we forget to worship or give thanks, two dangers surface: first, we think our own power or ability gave us the victory. Second, we think we deserve it because we are so good. Worship reminds us continually that it is God’s power which accomplishes mighty deeds for us, and also, it is only God’s mercy and grace which motivates him.

The rock pile will also stir future curiosity. In the future, each time the Israelites passed by the Jordan River, the children would ask their parents, “What do these stones mean?” The parents would say, “Here Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground, for the hand of the LORD is powerful. We should always fear and trust the LORD our God.”

It is always good to give God thanks and praise. C. S. Lewis said of worship, “I desire to express the same delight which caused David to dance.”

Prayer –

“Lord God, help me remember all the powerful ways you have shown me grace. I worship you. May my life be an expression of my grateful heart. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

March 12 –

“The Presence of the Holy”

Scripture –

“The commander of the LORD’s army said, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.”
Joshua 5:15

Years ago Denise gave me a framed photo of a gorgeous nature scene with wooded birch trees straight as posts and a touch of green leaves on the top, brilliant sunlight shines through the woods making the colors vibrant and spectacular. At the bottom of the frame it says, “When you come to a magic place – listen.”

Joshua meets the angel of the LORD, a messenger of God. When he realized that the angel was a divine being, Joshua fell on his face and asked for instruction. The angel said, “Take off your sandals, you are on holy ground.”

It was a watershed moment for Joshua, a commissioning for the task God called him to do, a moment in the presence of the Holy. It was Joshua’s “burning bush” moment like Moses before him. This divine visitation opened the way for a great miraculous victory.

Many believers describe such divine revelations, supernatural experiences where the individual encounters God’s presence in a way which changes them. Do you have a “burning bush” moment in your spiritual journey? Perhaps it was a moment out in the glory of nature – a sunset over a majestic mountain peak or the sunlight shimmering and glistening on the waters of a lake – an experience where your soul awakens to say, “Lord, you are here with me!” It might also be a moment of great danger and in the midst of the chaos you feel a great peace, and you realize, “God, that’s you, isn’t it?”

A holy moment, a place set apart, where ‘*in the presence of the holy*’ the believer’s heart is touched, and one’s faith is bolstered.

Yet, not all believers have some supernatural spiritual experience. That does not mean that one’s faith is less valid, nor that God’s love is not true. The truth is that Jesus invites us to step into the presence of the holy anytime. In Hebrews 4 we read that in the name of Jesus “we boldly or confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace in our time of need.

We have a standing invitation to step into the presence of the Holy. Anytime and anywhere, in prayer, we can stand before the LORD of creation, the LORD of life and ask for grace.

Prayer –

“Thank you, Lord Jesus, that we are welcome to come before you to share our hearts and ask for your help. Regardless of our different spiritual experiences, your promises are for all of us. Give us faith to trust your love and walk in your presence each day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

March 13 –

Your Jericho

Scripture –

“The gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.” Joshua 6:1

The city of Jericho lay just beyond the river. After crossing the Jordan to enter the land of promise, now the people face a formidable foe in order to continue to move into the Promised Land. Jericho was a strong and heavily fortified city with thick walls.

What is your Jericho?

The Bible uses words like “fortress” and “stronghold” to describe the elements of our lives which loom as a barricade to our growth in faith. Second Corinthians 10 says, “Though we walk in the flesh . . . the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses . . . and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”

Simply put, certain factors can impede our progress in spiritual growth. These strongholds might be temptations, wrong attitudes, misdirected behaviors, rhythms of habits which hold us captive, etc. They work against God’s purposes for us.

The angel of the LORD gave an unconventional, illogical plan to take on an impossible challenge. They were to march around Jericho once a day for six days. On the seventh day, led by seven priests with seven trumpets and the “ark of the covenant,” they were to march around the city seven times. On the seventh time around, they were to blow the trumpets and shout to the LORD. The LORD promised that the great walls would ‘come tumbling down.’ Not exactly a brilliant strategy of war.

The plan asked for the people to trust God’s promise. It required courage, action, and obedience. It did not rely on human power, but God’s power. And God gave them a tremendous victory.

When we face those “strongholds,” things in life which hold us back and are more powerful than we are, perhaps we would do well to “circle the problem” with prayer, asking God to intervene, praise God that he is faithful to his Word, and act in obedience as the Spirit guides. I don’t know if the problem will just disappear, but I do know that God will give strength and courage for us to face those obstacles with his help.

Prayer –

“Lord God, when life brings us challenges too great for us to face in our own strength, teach us to look to you for guidance, and give us faith to move forward in obedience to you. Bring down all elements of life which keep us from moving and growing in faith. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

March 14 –

Walls

Scripture –

“When the trumpet sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed.” Joshua 6:20

A farmer in North Dakota used to say to me, “The best way to create good neighbors is to build good fences.” He meant that clear boundaries establish the perimeters of a solid relationship, because everyone knows expectations, limits, and ownership.

Walls and fences have purpose, but they don’t give life.

They are built because of fear. If we lived in a perfect world, there would be no need of locks on our doors or walls around our property. Walls alleviate our fears by keeping unwanted would-be trespassers out.

Laws are like that too. They keep order and cultivate civility. And they protect the innocent from those who would exploit. But, like walls, they have no capacity to give life. They do nothing to build a community of love.

One more thing – the walls and fences which keep wrong-doers out keep those gripped by fear within. They impinge upon our freedom. Ask the old cowboys of the open range out west or the mountain trappers of an age long ago. They hated fences. Think of the Iron Curtain or the Berlin Wall. Eventually, people tore them down. They limited life.

Sometimes we use figurative walls to determine who is “in” and who is “out.” We sometimes decide for God who is worthy and who isn’t, who God loves and who he doesn’t. Careful -- inside those walls, the self-righteous, the arrogant, and the presumptuous hang out. We elevate ourselves to the position of judge behind those walls we put up.

God instructed the people to march around the city of Jericho seven times on the seventh day and to play the trumpets and to shout to the LORD. By God’s power the walls came crashing down.

I love the verses in Ephesians 2, “We who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Jesus is our peace. He has made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” The Prince of Peace is the Lord of life.

Prayer –

“Dear Jesus, help me face my fears because your love surrounds me. Forgive me when I judge others and view them as outsiders. Unite my heart to yours and open my heart to all people for your sake. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

March 15 –

Sin in the Camp

Scripture –

“When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long . . . I acknowledged my sin to Thee . . . and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin . . . Thou art my hiding place.” Psalm 32:3, 5, 7

Have you ever committed a secret sin and felt the weight of the burden of the wrong, hoping that it would never be discovered?

After the tremendous supernatural victory of Jericho, where the walls tumbled down by the power of the LORD, the Israelites came to the relatively small city of Ai. Here, surprisingly, they suffered a tremendous defeat.

Joshua honestly asked God, “Why did you bring us across the Jordan then allow us to be destroyed?” The LORD answered, “There is sin in the camp.” The LORD showed Joshua that, against the instruction of the LORD as Jericho fell, someone had plundered the city and hidden the treasure in the ground under their tent. As a result, the people experienced great defeat.

The sin of one can bring defeat and shame on a whole group, family, team, or even nation. Sin brings defeat, death, and despair. People are hurt. That’s why God names sin as sin. It destroys relationships, the peace one has with God, and the heart of the one committing the sin. It ultimately can destroy many people.

Have you ever committed a sin thinking no one knows? God always knows the truth. We cannot hide from him. We would be wise to always confess the sin as quickly as possible. Ask God for mercy. He has promised that he will never turn us away. He will always forgive.

The sin of one leads to the defeat of the people. So also, the obedience and victory of one leads to the forgiveness of all. David fought as one in battle against the giant Goliath, and the whole nation received victory.

Most significantly, Jesus the only Son of God died on the cross to take away the sins of all people everywhere for all history and into eternity. The righteous sacrifice of One gives victory to ALL people. Romans 8 says, “We are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us . . . Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.”

Prayer –

“Lord, you have promised that if we confess our sin, you are faithful and just to forgive our sin. Help us to believe. Wash our hearts clean so that each day is a new beginning in your love. Transform our lives to reflect your love and your grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

March 16 –

God's Response

Scripture

“Don't be afraid or be dismayed. I have given you . . . this land.” Joshua 8:1

What amazing patience and grace in God's response to sin and disobedience!

Have you ever worried that you have committed a sin so grievous that even God couldn't forgive? Ever worried that you might have sinned so frequently in the same area that you have exhausted the patience of God for you? Like the words of the old hymn, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”

Don't worry. Don't be afraid or discouraged. God never gives up on us. Ever heard the saying, “You may lose that battle, but the war has already been won.”?

I cherish another promise in the Word, “This I recall to mind, and therefore, I have hope. The Lord's loving kindnesses never cease, and his compassions never fail. They are fresh and new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.” [Lamentations 3:21-23].

Remember when we were children and played “Hide and Seek” in the yard with all the neighbors? Where have those days gone? If you hid very well so that no one “found” you and that round of the game was over, the one at home base would yell, “All ye, all ye in free.” A new ‘it’ has been tagged and all other hiders are safe to return to home base.

Because of Jesus, God calls out to each of us, wherever you are hiding, “All ye, all ye in free. It's safe to come to home base. I am waiting for you.”

I wonder what God thinks of me when I have sinned and I am hiding in fear, ashamed to face my Father? He says, “I understand. I forgive you. It's safe for you to come home.”

In Luke 15 Jesus tells the story of the son who wandered away and squandered his father's money on selfish, wrong choices. When he was broke and hungry, he realized that even the workers at his father's estate had it better than he did in the far country. Jesus says that when the Father saw him, he ran to greet him, threw his arms around him, kissed him repeatedly, and restored him to full privilege.

Wonder what our Father thinks when we fall? He is waiting to welcome us affectionately home. God's response to our sin is amazing.

Prayer –

“I fall repeatedly, Lord, and yet you love me. Thank you for love which knows no limits and never runs out. Transform me in your love to be all that you intend. In Jesus' name. Amen.”
