

Superhero

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. I want to ask you a question this morning. Who enjoys watching movies? Put up your hand. Movies, movies, yeah? Most people enjoy watching movies. Who of you enjoy watching movies, enjoy watching superhero movies? Spider-Man, Superman, Batman. Okay, quite a few. I enjoy a good superhero movie. Not all of them, but a good one.

And one of the most satisfying scenes, I think, in any movie that you can get is the classic superhero rescue scene. You know what I'm talking about? If you watch the superhero movie, you'll know what the scene is.

It takes many forms, but it typically involves some helpless victim who can't really do anything for themselves. And they're typically in a dark alley somewhere, surrounded all of a sudden by these really mean-looking thugs.

And it looks like the situation is going really badly until, of course, you see the superhero arrive. Now, he'll typically be standing silhouetted on the rooftop of a building. And the thugs, their first reaction is to look at him and laugh because he's dressed up in these funny clothes. And they just laugh him off.

But they don't realize that he's got superpowers. And then the next few moments, he uses his superpowers very effectively to dispatch the thugs, rescue the victim, and the thugs go running off with their tail between their legs.

[1 : 15] It's a very satisfying scene in a superhero movie. It's satisfying because the thugs underestimated their enemy, and then they got what they deserved in the end.

And it just makes us feel really good when we see that. Now, Joshua chapter 10 is very much the same kind of thing. It's the superhero scene of the book of Joshua. And it's meant to give us the same kind of satisfaction of seeing these multitudes of thugs get what was coming to them.

You see, the helpless victim was the city of Gibeon, which had just, we saw last week, made an alliance with the nation of Israel. And the gang of thugs were the southern coalition of Canaanite kings who had come together, who were previously enemies, but they had come together and allied in order to attack Gibeon.

And they were surrounding Gibeon, five armies together surrounding this little city. It's very much like the helpless victim in the dark alley with these thugs surrounding them. They can't do anything about it.

But then, you know what happens, is that the superhero arrives. And the superhero is Joshua and the Israelite army, who just arrive on the scene out of nowhere.

[2 : 26] A very surprising arrival of the scene. And what they do, through a series of incredible events, which Gene just read for us, is they give the enemy what for. And they took on five armies in one go and defeated them, which is just an impossible feat, or a seemingly impossible feat.

But the thing about superheroes, you must understand, is that they're almost always ordinary people. You know, Spider-Man is just ordinary Peter Parker.

Superman is ordinary Clark Kent. Batman is ordinary, what's his name? No, not the actor. Bruce Wayne, thank you. All right, you see, most superheroes behind the scenes are just ordinary people, but they're given some extraordinary ability.

They've got nothing special in and of themselves, but they're given a power from outside. And in the same way, Joshua and the Israelite army had nothing special in and of themselves.

They were ordinary human beings, just like you and me. How could they do this? Well, the reason is because they had an ability which was given to them from God. And that's what we've got to understand this morning.

[3 : 34] That what they do here is not just some clever tactics. It's something that is almost impossible because, well, practically impossible for a human being or a human army to achieve because God was giving them the ability to do it.

And so, as we read the story, it soon becomes apparent that the real superhero who saves the day is not Joshua or Israel, but it's God himself. God comes down to fight for his people.

And so, it's in this battle of Gibeon this morning that we're going to learn some important truths about who God is and what it means for us to be in relationship with this God who comes down for his people.

So, let's have a look. There's four truths that I want us to see about God this morning. The first is that God keeps his promises. God keeps his promises. The first thing I want to draw your attention to is verse 8.

Have a look. 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. Okay, now this is God's promise to Joshua, which gave Joshua the confidence to go into battle and rescue Gibeon.

[4 : 46] Okay, he wouldn't have been able to face these armies by himself. And no thinking general would ever attack five armies with one unless they had a reason to.

And this was Joshua's reason. He had this promise with God. Without this promise, it would have been a fool's errand. It would have been insane to mount this attack. But with God's promise, what seems insane becomes totally reasonable.

And that is what faith in God's word does. You see, Joshua shows us that faith changes people's behavior.

And not just Joshua and Israel, but to all who believe in God's word. Faith changes people's behavior. They live in ways that seem crazy to those on the outside.

That is what faith does. True faith. The reason you know that someone has true faith in God's word and in his promises is that their life is markedly different. They live in ways that seem strange, seem crazy.

[5 : 49] We find, for example, in Hebrews 11. You don't have to turn there. You can read it when you're at home. Hebrews chapter 11 in the New Testament gives us a lot of examples of people who live in faith and do things that seem insane.

So, for example, it says, By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear, built an ark to save his family. He built an ark on dry land, in the middle of dry land, and people laughed at him for doing it.

But God promised to save him if he did do it, and God did save him through it. It goes on, By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he didn't know where he was going.

He made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. Okay?

He left his security, he left what he knew for something he didn't know because of faith in God, because God had promised him something. And it goes on, By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

[6 : 58] You know Moses? Moses was brought up in the palace of Egypt, the most illustrious, rich lifestyle you could live. But he refused to live that lifestyle. He chose, it says, to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. And there's a lot more examples. The Bible is full of examples of God's people doing crazy things in light of God's promises, just like Joshua did here.

And so, if you're listening to this, or you're here perhaps in church this morning, and you're not a Christian. I don't assume that everyone who comes to church is a Christian, is a follower of Jesus.

And maybe you're coming here and you're trying things out. But you're not a Christian. I hope, if that's the case, you can begin to understand why your Christian friends seem like such weirdos.

Why they do things that seem crazy, like giving money to a church that they could use to spend on their own pleasures. It's crazy.

[8 : 09] Or like putting aside opportunities for promotion at work so that they can spend more time doing ministry or coming to Bible study. Or like leaving the comforts of one place because they're called to serve God in another.

Or like speaking about Jesus, even though that'll alienate them and make them unpopular. Why do they do these crazy things, these Christians? Well, I'll tell you why. Because they believe God's promises about God's kingdom and salvation and life after death.

These are realities for a Christian who believes God's word, who believes his promises. And they live for those things. That's why they look very different and live very differently, these Christians.

They believe what we sang in our opening song this morning. I believe in the resurrection. I believe that we will rise again. I believe in Jesus suffered and crucified to be our savior and that he's coming back.

Those truths are what a Christian doesn't just sing about, doesn't just say they believe, but they live according to those beliefs. Every day in light of those truths.

[9 : 17] Even if it seems crazy. Just like Joshua went forward into this battle in light of what God had promised, even though it seemed crazy for him to do it.

Because of God's promise. Now what's also interesting about this promise that God gave him in verse 8, which struck me when I was reading it, is that it wasn't a new promise.

This wasn't news to Joshua. God had already given him this very same promise at least twice before in the book of Joshua. But it was obviously now that he needed reminding of it.

Which is, I think, quite an encouragement to us. Even the great Joshua needed reminding. Even he forgot God's promises and needed to hear them again. And in the same way, if it's true for him, it's true for us.

Let's be honest. Because as God's people today, those who believe God's word and live by it and follow Jesus, even they can still tend to forget what he said. You know, we could come to church for years and years and years, and yet in the middle of the week when things are getting hectic, we forget.

[10 : 22] We don't recall and bring to mind God's promises. We can very easily forget what God's word says. We worry. We worry about money, even though he's promised us if we seek first his kingdom, all we need will be given to us.

We worry about sickness and security, even though he's promised us all things, even the bad things, will work together for the ultimate good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

We worry about death and where we're going when we die, even though he's promised us that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. These are promises, and God's word is full of promises.

And that's why, just like Joshua, because we forget these promises, we need reminding of them over and over and over again.

And that's one of the reasons you're here this morning. That's one of the reasons we come to church on a regular basis, not just when we feel like it, but regularly, because we've spent a week in a messed up world.

[11 : 24] And we need a reminder of what is true and what is right and what is good and where we're going. And, you know, we actually don't necessarily come here to learn new things.

I mean, maybe we do, but that shouldn't be the reason you come to church. Not necessarily to learn new things, but to be reminded again of the old things that we've heard already. Where are we headed?

Why are we here? And the promises that God has made through Jesus Christ, so that we can go into the new week and live in light of those promises, because we've been reminded of them.

Just like Joshua went boldly into that battle, knowing that God would keep his promises, because he's just been reminded by God of those promises. And so we learn from this that God keeps his promises, but we also learn something about ourselves, don't we?

That we need constant reminders of those promises. Don't neglect coming and sitting under God's word on a regular basis. Don't neglect Bible study. Don't neglect reading the Bible, even if you've read it before.

[12 : 27] You know, even if you know, don't ever say, oh, I've heard it all before. Oh, that preacher on Sunday, yeah, I know, he told me something I've already heard before. No, Joshua didn't do that.

Imagine when God gave him this promise, I'll be with you. Go into this crazy battle, I'll be with you. Imagine Joshua said, no, I've heard it all before. He didn't. He didn't. He was encouraged by this promise, because he knew that it's easy to forget, it's easy not to live in light of.

It's easy for us as well. We need reminders constantly. We need to come back, come back to these truths, over and over again. That's why we're doing this catechism. In the notices in this black block, there's a weekly catechism question.

Every week of this year is a new question, just a basic truth of God's word. And very often you'll read it and go, oh, I know that already. That's not the point. Okay?

Maybe you don't, and it's a great new lesson. But the point is not to learn something new. The point is to memorize what you already think you know, so that it can be constantly in your mind. And you can live by it during the week.

[13 : 30] The second thing we learn about God here is that God judges his enemies. God judges his enemies. Now this battle, let's just read it again.

It's intense. This battle is hectic. Verse 9. After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took these armies by surprise.

The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel. So Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. And then what it does is he goes into a bit of detail of just how that happened.

It says this. Israel pursued them along the road, going to Beth Haran, and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makedah. As they fled before Israel, listen to this.

As they fled before Israel on the road, down from Beth Haran to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down in them. And more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

[14 : 24] That's hectic. Okay? Imagine that. These armored troops, these professional soldiers, hundreds of them being wiped out by hailstones.

In the middle of, I mean, Israel. Desert country. It's quite a thing. And it goes on. If that's not enough, not even those who managed to escape the hailstones, you can imagine, like they saw their colleagues and their comrades being wiped out by these hailstones, but they managed to find some shelter.

And they just, they think, okay, let me just wait for nightfall, and then I can get away from this, and I can escape. Nope, you can't, because God stopped the sun from setting that day.

Until the Israelites had caught every last one of these Canaanites. That is crazy. Now, the world has seen many battles in its time.

This is a world of conflict. But it's never seen a battle like this, where the God of creation got personally involved. You see, this is what happens when the God of creation gets personally involved in a battle.

[15 : 25] And he used all the resources at his disposal to fight this enemy, and to make it obvious to them and to the Israelites that it was him fighting. You can't deny that fact.

I mean, it's not like the Israelites saw the sun standing still for 24 hours and goes, well, that's a coincidence. No. No, it's obvious that God is at work here.

That was the point. Now, just think of that. God intervening in this battle and using all the resources at his disposal to fight a human battle.

Now, humans ourselves, as a species, we've got quite good at war. We're very good at war. Over the years, we've come up with all kinds of bombs and tanks and jets and guided missiles.

And we've just, over the centuries, invented more and more refined ways of killing each other, basically. But all human weapons fade in comparison to the creator using his own creation to fight, like he did here.

[16 : 26] There's no defense against the God who rules all creation. You can't fight back against that. Only, yes, he could have just cut off the Canaanites' air supply if he wanted to, or stopped their hearts from beating.

But he wanted to show just how powerful and how much he is involved in this battle and how you can't resist this God. None of God's enemies can ultimately resist this God.

He is scary. We should fear him when we read things like this. But this story, this story of the Battle of Gibeon, is actually just a glimpse of what happens, ultimately, to anyone who gets on the wrong side of God in this world.

It's a warning. It's a serious warning. Because what happens to those who get on the wrong side of God is complete, utter, ruthless destruction. Like we see here. And this is a side of God which the world today desperately needs to hear about and understand.

Because the reason is we live in the age of God's gospel mercy, this age that we're living in now, where every day is another chance for people to make peace with God through Jesus.

[17 : 39] And he is extending this age far beyond what the early Christians ever thought he would, purely because of his mercy. He wants to give people a chance to come to him before it's too late.

But it won't last forever, this age that we're in. People think, okay, we're cruising. This is fine. It won't. It won't last forever. The Bible warns us, God has said today, when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

And he has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. There is a day in God's calendar where this age of gospel mercy will stop and God will come down and he will judge.

And what we read here in Joshua is just a foretaste of God dealing with his enemies. But because he's delaying that day, people have forgotten how dangerous this God is.

And they just deal with him nonchalantly. And they just don't really take God seriously. Because they've forgotten how dangerous he is. This world has made God cuddly.

[18 : 42] He's like a big teddy bear. But that's not what the Bible says. That's why we need to read our Old Testaments again. And remember that God will judge sin and rebellion completely with holy wrath.

And it will be fearful. And so if you're on the wrong side of him when that happens, I need to warn you this morning. If you're on the wrong side of God when that happens, well, let me read how Revelation describes it.

It says, then the kings of the earth. This is what's going to happen. This is the revelation of the Apostle John. The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty. Think of all those people.

Think of the Donald Trumps. Think of the, no, I don't know where he stands with the Lord at the moment. I doubt very much that he is what he claims to be. But that's besides the point.

All these rich people, all these people are confident in themselves. All the important people. All the beautiful people. Listen to what will happen to those who haven't really taken God seriously in their lives.

[19 : 44] The generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

For great is the day of their wrath, and it has come, and who can withstand it? That's a scary scene. But the Bible says that's going to happen. You don't want to be on the wrong side of God on that day, let me tell you.

And so if you're here this morning, and you're still wondering where you stand with God. If you don't know where you stand with God, you need to know there are only two sides you can be on.

One of two sides. Those who are with him, and those who are against him. There's no middle ground. There's no, oh well I've tried to be good all my life, but I haven't really concentrated on God too much.

No, you're either with God, or you're against God. There's no middle ground. And those who are with him follow Jesus, who he sent to make peace between us and God. He is the only way to have peace between us and God, because of our sins.

[20 : 52] Because only Jesus took human sin on himself. And he's given us a chance to come to God in right relationship. And so those who are on the right side of God with him, are those who follow Jesus.

And the rest, the rest, those who ignore Jesus and live their own way, they are against God. The Bible warns. And so I've got to ask you this morning. My duty is to ask you this morning, what side are you on?

Genuinely, don't just say, yeah, I'm on the right side because I come to church. No, that's not going to cut it. What side are you really on? Is Jesus your king? Do you follow him? Do you trust him? Do you live according to the truth in the word, or do you live your own life your own way and ignore him most of the time?

Which side are you on? Very important question to ask. We've only got these 80 or 90 years on earth to make sure that we're on the right side of God. Use them wisely. Don't waste them. But if you are on God's side, if you know, if you've put your faith in Jesus, if you've come to him and repented, and he is your king, then what happens here is a great encouragement.

Because I want you to notice, thirdly, that God fights for his people. And that is a huge encouragement to those who know they are part of his people today. God fights for his people.

[22 : 08] And he shows that there are literally no lengths that he won't go to for his people. Look at verse 13 again. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.

There's never been a day like it before or since. A day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel. Now, you might be going, sun stopping in the middle of the sky for 24 hours.

I mean, what about the rotation of the earth? Wouldn't we all fly off and stuff? Actually, no. Scientists have shown that we wouldn't all fly off the earth if the rotation of the earth stopped. But you might still be wondering if this is true.

How can it be true? Because of all the geophysical effects that it would have. You know, the changing of the coastlines, the gravity shifts, and the water. And there's a lot of ways we can question whether what happened here really happened.

But we can discuss this more in growth groups. That's what we're going to be discussing as we study the Bible in growth groups. But for now, suffice it to say, if God wanted to do this, he can. He's God.

[23 : 16] He can do whatever he wants. And that's the whole point of a miracle. A miracle is something that science can't explain. And that's the point. It's meant to get our attention. If science could explain it away, it wouldn't get our attention.

And this miracle certainly does get our attention, doesn't it? Because what it teaches us is that there are no lengths that God won't go to to give his people victory and to give them the promised land.

That's the truth that we get out of this miracle. There are no lengths God won't go to to give his people victory. Now, you might not be feeling that you're living a very victorious life at the moment.

You might feel burdened on all sides. You might just be feeling your age. You know what I mean? Feeling that your body is malfunctioning more and more every day.

You might be struggling to make ends meet. Maybe you're really in financial difficulty. You might just be weighed down by the brokenness and sadness of this world. You might be struggling with depression.

[24 : 19] Whatever it is. Well, I want you to know this morning, while you might be in the middle of a battle, if you are on God's side, if you are part of his covenant people, I want to tell you this morning, there are no lengths he won't go to for your ultimate good.

There are no lengths God won't go to to give you ultimate victory and to give you ultimate eternal life in the promised land. And he proves that. He proved it to us when he came down himself to earth as Jesus.

When he went to the very extreme of dying for us, the creator who gives life, willing to give up his life for these creatures who have turned away from him and who have rebelled against him.

He went to the very extreme of dying for us to give us victory over sin and over Satan. And if he went to those lengths for you, if you are a believer, if you trust in that this morning, then you can know that he is always with you, even in the middle of the battle, even when things are rubbish.

You can know that the God of creation is for you, that he's fighting for you, that there's no lengths he won't go to for you. Now, the Israelites had many more battles to face on their way to their inheritance, which we carry on reading in the book of Joshua.

[25 : 46] But imagine how this event in Joshua 10 stuck in their minds as they faced those future battles. Imagine, as they went into battle, the confidence they would have had thinking as they were marching and seeing the enemy in front of them.

And they thought, God stopped the sun for us. He must be on our side. And that gave them confidence to go forward. Well, you see, if you're a Christian, no matter what you face in this life, you can have the confidence of knowing, God died for me.

I think he's on my side. Or more technically, I'm on his side. And that is a huge reassurance. But then finally, the fourth truth we learn about God from this passage, and it's an amazing one, is that God answers the prayers of his people.

What's striking about this story is the narrator commenting on God stopping the sun. He says this in verse 14, There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being.

Okay, the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down for 24 hours, but the narrator is more amazed by the fact that God answered the prayer of a human.

[27 : 06] Okay? What's even more amazing than this unique day that history has never seen since, is that God listened to a human being. Because you see, the fact is that God stopping the sun was a direct answer to Joshua's prayer.

Joshua prayed for it. No doubt, the situation was this. The enemy was escaping. Many of them maybe escaped the hailstones. And the day was getting on.

And if night fell, you know, they didn't have night vision in those days. They didn't have big search helicopters and torches. If night fell, the enemy would have escaped. And so Joshua asked the impossible, I need a longer day.

And then, probably to his surprise, God said, Okay, here you go. Boom. Another 24 hours of daylight. God answered the request of a human being.

And that is the real miracle of this passage. Okay? That's the point. We're supposed to, of course, be blown away by the miracle of the sun stopping, but the real miracle is that God listened to a man.

[28 : 09] The creator God would condescend not only to hear the request of a creature, but to respond. The God of creation, think about this, the God of creation, who, when you look up at the stars in the sky, made all of those, is infinitely beyond all of those.

All of the power of those stars, which each has the power of our own sun, or much more. God, the powerful creator of all of that, who made all the galaxies that extend far beyond what we can see in astronomers, are still discovering new galaxies, which are just immense.

Even if you were traveling at the speed of light, it would take you hundreds of thousands of years to just, you know, cross one side of the galaxy to the next. And there's millions of those galaxies. This God is amazing.

He is huge. We are tiny, tiny, tiny. And yet, this God of creation moved his hand in response to the request of one human being. Isn't that incredible? It boggles the mind.

Now, of course, we mustn't forget this wasn't any human being. The reason that God listened to Joshua was because Joshua listened to God. He obeyed the requirements of being in a covenant with God.

[29 : 25] And so he benefited from the awesome covenant privilege of being in a relationship with this creator God. And now we're thinking, well, you know, good for Joshua.

But I'm not Joshua. No, you're not. But this is where the story points to Jesus, you see. Everything in the Bible points to Jesus, by the way. Because Jesus came to earth for us, his people, to fulfill all of the covenant requirements of being in a relationship with God.

On behalf of those who trust and follow him. So that through him, we can enjoy the same, the very same covenant benefits as Joshua himself enjoyed. You.

You. Little old you. You know, you might not think much of yourself. But you, if you are a follower of Jesus, can enjoy the very same relationship with the creator that Joshua had here.

A relationship with your creator such that he moves his hand in response to your prayers. I mean, I don't know about you, but that blows me away.

[30 : 36] That God, the creator of all of this, can move his hand. He will act in response to my prayers. Because I pray them through Jesus. And that is a miracle. That is the miracle of this passage.

God still moves his hand today in response to the prayers of his people. And so if you belong to Jesus, if you are living in him, realize what that means. And don't be afraid to ask the impossible of God.

Because he is a God of the impossible. And he is ready to move mountains for his people. That is what he shows us here. Not to say that he will always give you what you ask for.

No, no, no. Don't push it. But he will always respond. And he will always respond for the ultimate good of his people and his glory through you.

And you can know that. And so pray. Pray. Realize what an amazing thing prayer is. One of the worst attended meetings of the church year is our prayer meeting.

[31 : 37] Literally, we have got like 10 people. Which is just silly. I was going to say something worse. But it's just silly. Because think of, if you realize from this passage what prayer is.

That we can pray and know that God, the God of creation moves his hand in response to those prayers. We will never want to stop praying. We will want to take prayer so seriously in our lives. We will never want to take a step in our lives without praying.

And knowing that God hears the prayers. So pray. Pray for God to do incredible things. Pray for God to do incredible things in Plumstead and Southfield through this church.

That we could never do by ourselves. Pray for God to do incredible things in your own life. That will glorify him and change you into the person he wants you to be. Which you could never do in your own strength.

Pray for God to do the impossible. Because he's ready and willing to do it. And to go to any lengths for his glory and your ultimate good.

[32 : 38] So pray. If you're in Christ, realize whenever you pray, the creator of the universe is hearing you from his throne. And he is readying himself to respond.

And if you take nothing home today, take that fact home. Of course, you can only benefit from that if you are on God's side. And if you still don't know where you stand with him, please come speak to me.

I can give you a booklet that can just explain to you what Jesus did so that you can come into the covenant. Come into a real relationship with God. If you don't know where you are, you know, this life is uncertain.

You don't know when each day is going to be your last. And so, don't delay. Come to me. I'll be happy to just give you a booklet that will explain it. No questions asked.

But if you are, if you are in the covenant, if you are one of God's people through Christ, then let me close with this great assurance from the book of Hebrews. It says, Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[33 : 44] Well, let's do that now, shall we? Let's pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray.

And find out more. So that they can come into the relationship with you for which we have been designed, for which we exist. And find joy and salvation in that.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.