

Is It Possible For God To Do the Impossible?

Please turn with me to the book of Joshua chapter 10. We're going to try to kill two birds with one sermon: bring our Joshua series to a close (at least for now) and share an encouragement for us as we prepare for a New Year.

Josh 10:1-15

A little old gray-haired lady was leaving church one Sunday and as she got to the minister she gave him a hearty handshake and said, "that was a wonderful message, preacher. Everything you said applies to someone I know."

If we're honest, we can be a lot like that little old lady. We hear a convicting message and we think, "I hope Bill is listening to this." Or, "wow, Suzy really needed to hear that!" We're tempted to apply God's word to other people more than we are to our own lives.

Then we come to a chapter like Josh. 10 and we have a hard time applying it to ours or anyone we know's life. There are two major things that happen in Josh. 10:

- The Israelites start a scorched earth killing campaign throughout Canaan
- And just about the time that quittin' time comes due to lack of daylight, God helps them work overtime at killing and destroying by stopping the sun in its tracks.

Killing spree and the sun stopping. Make you think of anyone you know? I think this chapter could even stump that little old lady. What exactly are we meant to do with a chapter like Josh 10?

First, let's recognize that the book of Joshua records for us a historically unique moment in time that God doesn't mean to repeat. Joshua himself says there has never been a day like it before or since. This isn't a template for the next time you're mowing the lawn and find yourself running out of daylight. "Hey God, could you just stop the sun moving till I finish the backyard?" Not the best application of this chapter.

What we find in Joshua 10 is a surprising and incredible glimpse at who God is. The God of Josh 10 is the God of today, He hasn't changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But that leaves us with hard questions such as why did God sanction this scorched earth killing campaign throughout the region? Joshua is a bloody book and chapter 10 starts the bloodiest part. Why would God be ok with that? And what do we do with the sun and moon standing still in the sky? How did/could God do that? We will consider these difficulties briefly this morning.

But first, let's drop into the historical setting and what's going on: In chapter nine we saw the Gibeonites, who lived just a few miles away from Jericho, pretend to come from a long distance and trick Israel into making a peace treaty with them. When the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek heard this, he panics and in his fear decides that the best defense is a good offense so he calls four other kings and says, lets go strike down Gibeon for making a treaty with Israel. Gibeon sees these five kings and their armies coming and they call out to Israel for help because this treaty obligates Israel to defend them.

Joshua and his men suit up to fight these five kings, and the Lord encourages Joshua with the same words He spoke to him in chapter 1: I am with you, don't be afraid. No one will be able to stand against

you. Emboldened by these words Joshua and his men march all night and mount a surprise attack on the armies of the five kings. They will go on to kill those five kings and all their men, then go systematically from town to town killing everyone and destroying everything.

This is tough stuff. I had a step-grandfather who as a young man turned away from the Christian faith and he would point specifically to Joshua to explain why he didn't believe in the God of the Bible. How could God condone all that killing? Throw in the sun stopping and this is a book that skeptics can point to as an excuse for their skepticism and unbelief.

To grapple with these questions, we need to understand a couple ground rules about the Bible. The Bible isn't trying to "come up with a God we'll be comfortable with". God is God, we don't define Him or judge Him. He defines us and judges us. If we approach God in pride, that same pride will keep us from knowing God at all. But the Bible promises if we approach God in humility, He will reason with us, and reveal Himself to us. Josh 10 reveals two amazing characteristics of God.

1. God is a warrior who fights for His people

Joshua and his army have an active role in the battle, but there is no doubt as we read this we're meant to see God as the primary warrior in this battle. It is God who throws the enemy into a panic. It is God who rains down hailstone upon their adversaries, killing more men by hailstones than Israel did by sword. God is a warrior.

We're probably not used to thinking of God in that light. But the Bible often speaks of God in warrior terms. Psalm 24 says, *Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.*⁸ *Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!*

In Rev. 19 the Apostle John has this vision of Jesus: *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.* Rev. 19:11

God is revealed in the Bible as a loving and forgiving God, but He is also a righteous Judge who hates sin with a fierce hatred. For four hundred years God patiently suffered the inhabitants of Canaan to grow darker and more wicked in their sin, but there came a day when God said, "enough" and commanded Joshua to scorch earth these wicked societies. Patience came to an end and judgment fell. It's a small foretaste of what awaits all of mankind on Judgment Day.

God has full authority over our lives. We don't own our lives, God does. He gave us life, breathed life into us, created us. He can call back His breath whenever He chooses to – and He is righteous when He does so. These five kings and their armies who were slaughtered is a picture of the world in regards to God. It is at war with God. In fact in Revelation, at Armeggedon, all the armies of the world will gather to make war with the Lord of hosts and Jesus will destroy them. God is a warrior. And sin has made us all His enemies. That's the bad news the Bible gives us.

Into that bad news the Bible speaks incredibly good news: while we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us. Jesus took the judgment of God's wrath in our place. The cross is the greatest demonstration of God's love for you and me in all the world. But it's also the greatest display of God's judgment and wrath against sin. God hates sin that much. He requires blood and death as punishment for sin. We can either

stand before God and face His judgment, or we can believe that Jesus stood in our place. Took our judgment. Paid our price.

The Bible promises that all who believe in Jesus are no longer God's enemy but have been made God's friend. More than that, God's son or daughter. God the warrior becomes God the Father to us. Joshua 10 reminds us that God is a warrior who fights for His people.

Because like it or not we're all in a fight. Life is a fight. For us the enemy isn't some dude named Adonizadek, it's not flesh and blood at all. But we fight. Circumstances can turn an ordinary day into a battlefield. The loss of a job. The doctor says the word "cancer" and our lives are turned upside down. The rebellion of a son or daughter. Out of the blue circumstances can put us on the battlefield and we are suddenly fighting an enemy that seems bigger and stronger than we are, and we feel helpless.

Some of the greatest battles are fought on the battlefield of the heart. We fight the constant tug and pull of sin on our hearts. We fight fears and anxieties that try to overrun our emotions. We fight doubt and unbelief. Discouragement and depression. Waves of sadness that threaten to drown us.

Even when things are going well and the battle seems under control, we fight pride and arrogance. We think we're bigger and stronger and better and wiser and more in control than we really are. Pride is one of our most dangerous enemies, and possibly the hardest one to see in ourselves.

We are on the battlefield. Whether its circumstances or the battlefield of the heart I know some of the battles going on right here in this church. The fight is real. The battle is real. And our God is a warrior and He fights for His people. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, he is fighting for you. He says, do not be afraid. I am with you. I have given you the victory. No demon in hell, no sin, no fear, nothing in your past and nothing in your future can overcome you or separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Our God is a warrior!

The second truth about God this chapter reveals is that...

2. It's possible for God to do the impossible

Joshua prayed *"Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon."*¹³ *And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Vv. 12-13*

And the Bible says *the sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.* These verses raise a lot of questions that have many cynics ridiculing the Bible. Some might ridicule the Bible's claim that the "sun stood still", when we know the sun doesn't move; the earth does. But the Bible is simply doing what we do all the time: speaking of the sun in terms of our perspective. We know the earth revolves around the sun, but it appears as though the sun is moving and we're standing still. So even though we know the sun isn't moving, the earth is, we still say the sun rises and sets.

But even if we allow the language (which is poetic by the way) to be expressing the sun and the moon's position from our perspective, to cause the sun to remain still for twice the length of a day would take the earth stopping its rotation. If this were to happen, it would cause cataclysmic devastation. In the 1960's movie *Inherit the Wind*, an attorney asks a Christian if he believes the sun actually stood still for Joshua. The Christian affirms that he does. The lawyer then says, *"Now, if what you say actually happened – if*

Joshua stopped the sun in the sky – the earth stopped spinning on its axis, continents toppled over one another, mountains flew into space, and the earth, shriveled to a cinder, crashed into the sun. Now, how come they missed that little tidbit of news?”

With those words, the Christian’s faith is made to look ridiculous. Do you actually believe that? Some Christians try to explain what happens in Josh 10 not as a prolonging of the day but a prolonging of the night by a solar eclipse. They have arguments to support this but personally I don’t find their arguments convincing.

But I don’t have a better explanation. I don’t know how God did it. I don’t know how God did any of the miracles the Bible says He did. The skeptic is free to ridicule my faith, but I would answer it’s only because they don’t understand my faith. The lawyer’s argument in *Inherit the Wind* misses an important component to the logic of faith: He ascribes to God the ability to suspend some laws of nature (stopping the earth’s rotation) but limits His ability to suspend other laws of nature (the cataclysmic consequences of stopping the earth’s rotation).

Let’s consider a different example. When a person dies, their heart stops beating. Their brain and organs cease to function and an irreversible state of decomposition sets in. The blood coagulates, clumping and clotting in the veins. Oxygen ceases to reach the bodies cells. Rigor mortis sets in. These are all natural consequences of death.

So the lawyer might ask, “do you believe that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after four days?” The Christian would respond “I do.” The lawyer would continue: “But if that actually happened, Lazarus’ body would be rotted, his brain and heart decaying, his blood so clumped up it wouldn’t be able to flow through his rotting body. Lazarus would have been a walking zombie. How did the Bible miss that piece of news?”

The answer is that God’s awesome power to suspend laws of nature applies to all laws. God reversed all the natural processes of death in Lazarus (and a little later in His Son Jesus), making all new again. We can’t do that, but God can! It is possible for God to do the impossible.

As an aside, how many things that we take for granted today would have been ridiculed as impossible a thousand years ago? Because they were impossible? No, because our knowledge was so limited back then. Our knowledge is still ridiculously limited, and it’s arrogant to think otherwise.

Getting back to the sun and moon stopping. There’s so much about how this universe operates that we don’t know. Experts in cosmology admit that what they think they know is minute and much of it could be very, very wrong. Just a few weeks ago I read they found a black hole in our galaxy that shouldn’t exist according to experts. But it does. What happens when we discover something that by our calculations shouldn’t be possible but is? We recalibrate our calculations. My answer isn’t to deny science, it’s to say there’s so much we don’t know, and that God is so far greater than any scientific knowledge we have. Yes there are laws of physics, but they are only called laws because we observe them to always be true. The Bible says that’s true because God created order in His creation – but the God who created the laws of physics can suspend those laws completely and probably in a million different ways we can’t even imagine, if He chooses to.

Maybe God stopped the earth from rotating – and suspended all the natural consequences of that happening. Maybe God messed with time. Did you know that time is also a mysterious entity? Theories are that the faster you go the more time slows down – it's called the dilation of time. God could "dilate" time making the day seem longer. I don't know how He did it. But I believe He did.

By saying this, I'm not denying science, I'm recategorizing science. The cynics believe that science tells God what He can or can't do, and I believe that God tells science what it can or can't do. He who created a universe so complex we can barely scratch the surface of its secrets, can also command that creation to do things that I can't do, and I can't understand. To me that seems reasonable.

The question isn't do we believe in science? Of course we do. The question is do we believe there's a God who does the impossible? Does our understanding and appreciation of science lead us to atheism or to faith? Christians must believe in a God who does the impossible because all of Christianity is built on the impossible.

- How can we lead a person from spiritual death to spiritual life? Charles Spurgeon put it well when he said, *To wash and dress a corpse is a far different thing from making it alive: man can do the one, God alone can do the other.* God alone can do it cause it's impossible.
- How can God hear billions of prayers all at once? It's impossible.
- How can an infinite God become a finite man? It's impossible.
- How can Jesus' blood cleanse the gazillions of sins committed by mankind throughout all of history? It's impossible.
- How can Jesus have been resurrected on the third day, never to die again? It's impossible.
- How can God resurrect all the dead on the last day, some to eternal life and some to eternal judgment? It's impossible.

Jesus said with man it's impossible, but with God all things are possible.

So, in our most difficult circumstances, in our deepest trials, and when we are fighting our greatest heart battles, remember, God may not stop the sun from moving for you but He will move heaven and earth before He will fail or forsake even one of His children. Let's hear Spurgeon's words again:

He who counts the stars and calls them by their names, is in no danger of forgetting His own children! He knows your case as thoroughly as if you were the only creature He ever made, or the only saint He ever loved! - Spurgeon

We see a picture of God in Josh 10. A picture that applies to every one of our lives. Whatever battle is going on in your life, God is a warrior and He is fighting for you. God is the God who does the impossible.

As we enter 2020, let's encourage each other to believe for and pray for the impossible. For that person who is far from God to come to a living faith in God. For God to give us victory over sins that have controlled us for years and over fears that have bound us for years. For a healing, or a financial need.

And if you're the skeptic, two things: humble yourself. Pride isn't a good compass – it distorts our perception of reality. And humbly ask God if He's real to reveal Himself to you. He can, and He will, if you're humbly sincere in asking.