

Jesus and Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15)

Hello, my name is Stephen Sizer. Please open your Bible and turn with me to Joshua 5 and let us see what God has to say to our world and the tensions we face, whether at home or at work, politically in government or diplomatically abroad. In the five preceding books we have encountered the Lord Jesus in the types and images God introduced to prepare his people for the day when he would come in person to rescue them. We have seen the Lord Jesus in the Passover Lamb, in the Bronze Snake, in the Day of Atonement and in the Prophet Moses promised God would send. But today in Joshua, we meet Jesus in the person of the Commander of the army of the Lord. The Burning Bush was a picture of the Incarnation, but here is the Commander of the army of the Lord in person. Why this special revelation? Why here? Why now? Remember Joshua has only just taken over from Moses. For more than 80 years, he has observed how the people mistreated Moses. He remembers how they rejected his own advice 40 years earlier and did not enter the land. They believed the majority report

“...the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.” (Numbers 13:28). That is why none of the adults who came out of Egypt, apart from Joshua and Caleb, survived the desert wanderings. Joshua is leading a new generation, a young generation who have only experienced life in the desert. Joshua is also facing an incredible fortress. Jericho was surrounded by double walls, thirty feet high. The outer wall was six feet thick and the inner wall, twelve feet thick. They were reinforced by connecting walls between them. It is evening and Joshua has a lot on his mind. He can't sleep. He goes for a walk alone. Then he realises he is not alone.

To be victorious you must humble yourself before God

“Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” (Joshua 5:13-14)

The man Joshua meets near Jericho is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Think about it, the commander of the army of Israel meets the Commander of the army of the Lord. There is no contest, no argument, no debate.

Just complete and total submission. There is a New Testament parallel when Jesus confronts another commander, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said... When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.” (John 18:4-6)

Why did they fall to the ground like Joshua? Perhaps because they knew what Jesus could do. Remember before Pilate, Jesus was supremely confident, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." (John 19:11). Jesus is about to die but who is on trial? Figure out who is being interrogated? Who is in charge around here? That is why in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus challenges Peter when he tries to defend Jesus,

“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus insists God could put at Jesus’ disposal, twelve legions of angels. Do you know how many soldiers there were in a legion? A legion was the basic unit in a Roman army.

It typically consisted of 6,000 soldiers. These were not just any soldiers. For most of the Roman Imperial period, the legions were a part of the Imperial army and formed its elite heavy infantry. So work out the maths $12 \times 6,000 = 72,000$ elite soldiers. But Jesus isn't talking about soldiers. He's talking about something far more terrifying. 72,000 angels, and not the ones you find depicted on Christmas trees. These are powerful supernatural "angels of fire" (Hebrews 1:7). We get one glimpse of what the army of the Lord looks like. 2 Kings 6 tells the story of Elisha and his servant in serious trouble with the king of Syria. The king sends an army of horses and chariots to surround the city where Elisha is staying. His servant wakes in the morning to find they are surrounded and about to be slaughtered. With great fear he tells Elisha of the situation. But Elisha replies confidently,

"Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:16-17)

It's not a question of whether God is on my side but whether I am on his. Humility is simply confidence properly placed. Humility is not about putting yourself down. Humility is knowing who God is, and that where you are going is in his hands. So, firstly, to be victorious you must humble yourself before the Lord

To be victorious you must worship Jesus as your Lord

“Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” (Joshua 5:14-15)

No wonder Joshua falls face down in reverence and the Commander insists he removes his shoes. For Joshua is in the presence of the Holy One. From that position of self-abasement, probably not even looking up, Joshua asks “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” If he is ‘My Lord’ then I am ‘his servant’. See that? Jesus is standing, Joshua is kneeling. Jesus is speaking. Joshua is listening. Worship is not just about singing or speaking. Its also about asking and listening. I am sure you are like me

in wishing God spoke to me as clearly as He did that day to Joshua. But I do know 3 things

- 1. It takes time:** Getting the answers to major life decisions doesn't happen overnight.
- 2. It takes patience:** You don't get the answers exactly when you want them. God is not a drive-thru. He's more interested in cultivating character than in dishing out easy answers
- 3. It takes work:** Answers to prayer don't always come easy. To know what God wants for you, specifically, is a challenge. But understand this: God wants you to know His will.

To be victorious you must humble yourself before the Lord.

To be victorious you must worship Jesus as your Lord.

To be victorious you must in all things obey the Lord

“The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.” (Joshua 5:14-15)

Joshua did so. He obeyed, and because he obeyed he was victorious.

As he followed the Lord's instructions and led God's people on a walk around Jericho seven times, it was clear to all, friend and foe alike, that it was the Commander of the army of the Lord who brought down the walls. It was the Commander of the Lord's army who gave them victory. Hebrews tells us "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days."

(Hebrews 11:30). And you know what? By faith in our Commander, our Sovereign Lord, we can too.

The battles before us this week are won when we remember who is in charge. When we are tempted to think we have God on our side we will eventually be defeated. When we seek to be on His side, victory is assured. From Joshua we learn:

To be victorious you must humble yourself before God.

To be victorious you must worship Jesus as your Lord.

To be victorious you must in all things obey the Lord.

The book of Joshua closes with an exhortation. Joshua reminds them that God has fought for them and brought them victory. Joshua invites them to choose this day whom they will serve, but adds his own resolution,

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15). Joshua's last act is to set up a great stone as a witness to the renewal of the Covenant. He dies at the age of a hundred and ten, leaving God's people in the hands of a series of judges, we will meet next week. By contrast, our Joshua never dies. Our Joshua brings us into the good land. When we abide under His leadership we shall possess it and have victory over our enemies. The question is not whose side is He on, but whose side are we on? May God bless you.