

I. Set Up

A. Welcome / Week three.

B. Joshua is an action-packed book. We have been focused on it because it tells the story of how Israel used their second chance. .

C. Last week we watched as Joshua took a big risk and ordered the priests to step into the raging river. And we saw how God honored that. The big question was are you willing to take that step.

D. This week we ask a different question. Or rather, we watch as Joshua asks a question, only to have it turned right back on him.

II. Introduction

A. When I was four, I was scared of wolves. Given that I had never seen one (except in cartoons), and given that we lived in the suburbs, where wolves were not exactly roaming the streets, this was not a rational fear. Of course, not all fears are rational.

B. Whatever the reason, I had nightmares and often had trouble falling asleep – in part because on some nights I was sure I could see the image of wolves in the shadows of my curtains. That meant they were right outside my window.

C. Now, I shared a bedroom with my two sister’s – and their bed and crib were next to the window. So, I was pretty sure the wolf would go for them first. I had mixed emotions about that, after all, it would give me more time to get away.

D. But mostly, I was distressed and sometimes I’d cry out for my Mom, who would try to calm my fears, assuring me that there were no wolves outside the window. And that would often work. However, I still had to decide who I was going to believe: my fears or my Mom.

E. In a related way, we have to decide who we are going to believe: our fears or our God? It turns out, this is an important question. Worth asking as we “reset.” And it gets some ink in Joshua 5.

III. This is the third message in this series

A. In the first I noted that the big idea behind the book of Joshua was that obeying God – trusting Him – is the path forward. In that sermon I talked about second chances. Under Moses the Jews had opted not to cross the Jordan, and as a result they spent the next forty years in the desert. The Book of Joshua opens with Moses’s death, and Joshua taking over right back in the same place with the same question. Are they going to obey God and “go forward” or not. Trusting him looks impossible.

B. Last week we watched as Joshua - who is a good guy: he is a Christ figure; his name means “Yahweh is Salvation,” and he closes the book with the challenge that says it all, “Choose for yourself what you are going to do. But as for me and my house, we are going to serve the Lord.”

C. Last week we read Joshua 3, seeing Joshua lead the people through the Jordan at flood stage.

1. We saw how – per God’s instructions – the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went first. And how, as soon as they stepped into the Jordan River, it parted.

2. Last week I talked about taking steps of faith, noting that though much of our relationship with God is about a long obedience in the same direction, there are events – moments that matter, inflection points, decision points – where we have to decide. Times we have to take a stand.
3. I went on to challenge you to take those steps of faith. We offered rocks – because after crossing the Jordan they were instructed to build two altars. I also pushed baptism and getting into a small group.
- D. Today we are exploring an event found in chapter five.
- IV. The people have now crossed the river and are camped in Israel not far from Jericho.
- A. A few things have happened since we left: 1) the men have been circumcised – they have reaffirmed the covenant God made with Abraham – one that included the idea the Promised Land was for them; 2) and the entire group has celebrated the Passover; and 3) the manna they have been eating every day for the last forty years has stopped falling from the sky.
- B. They now face their next challenge: Jericho. This is the fortified city in front of them.
1. I have been to the ruins of Jericho. They have done little excavating so far. The site did get some press a few years ago when the archeologists leading the dig claimed that she had found the city, arguing that it must be Jericho because the city walls had fallen out. (Of course, normally, walls would be battered down. They would be pushed in not out. But not with Jericho. As you might know, God wants to teach the Jewish people to trust him. He wants it to be clear that this is all about him not them. So he has them march around the city – it’s about 8-9 acre site – once a day for six days. And then, on the seventh day, they go around it seven times and shout and the walls came down.
- C. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. In our text today, Joshua doesn’t know any of this. And he is out walking at night. And he appears to be alone. And it is pretty easy to imagine that he is out walking because he can’t sleep, and that he can’t sleep because he has this big challenge ahead of him: Jericho.
- D. And the people who live there are big – Shaquille O’Neal size. Joshua saw them forty years ago. And there are walls around the city and so he is out trying to come up with a plan. This does not look doable at the moment. He has an inexperienced army and no supplies – they have a defensive posture.
1. He’s in charge. And he got them across the Jordan. But that was yesterday’s challenge. He now faces a new one, and given the number of times in the book Joshua he is told not to be fearful but instead to be courageous, you can be assured that he was fearful.
2. There is probably a message there for leaders in many other walks of life. Give the people you lead the gift of a non-anxious presence.
- E. At this moment he can’t sleep, so he is likely walking around trying to work out a plan. And the closer he gets to Jericho the taller the walls get. And he doesn’t know what he is going to do. They need to capture this city. Everything depends upon it. But he has no grand plan.
- F. And as he is walking, he meets someone. Let me read – Josh. 5:13f:

1. 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?”
2. “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”
3. 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.

- V. Please understand, the person he meets here is Jesus.
- A. In the morning devotions this month, we’ve been in Hebrews, where the big theme is: Jesus is bigger than anyone and anything, bigger than whatever challenge you are facing.
 - B. One of the ways he is bigger is that He is eternal. Christ’s life did not begin with conception. He pre-existed birth. At the incarnation he added humanity to deity. That is the Christmas miracle.
 - C. So, He was alive during the Old Testament era, and in fact he made several cameo appearances
 1. In both of the last two sermons I have pointed to people who foreshadowed Jesus, suggesting that they were signs pointing ahead to Jesus.
 2. I have argued that the Bible is not a collection of random events. It has an underlying and unifying narrative. It is all about Jesus. In the Old Testament a whole lot of people and events are pointing to Jesus.
 3. And to make that point I have highlighted a line – not my own – that has been used for hundreds of years. I have said:
 - a) The story of Adam and Eve is not just about the first man and woman; it points to **the true and better** Adam who passed the test in the Garden and whose obedience is ascribed to us.
 - b) Likewise, Jesus was the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain, has blood that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for our acquittal.
 - c) Jesus is the true and better Abraham, who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar and go out into the void to create a new people of God.
 - d) Jesus is the true and better Isaac, the son who was not just offered up by his father on the mount, but was truly sacrificed for us all.
 - e) Jesus is the true and better Jacob who wrested and took the blow of justice we deserved.
 - f) Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.
 - g) Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.

- h) Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his foolish friends.
- i) Jesus is the true and better David, who slew the giant without us doing a thing.
- j) Jesus is the true and better Passover Lamb - innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us.
- k) Jesus is the true and better temple, the true and better prophet, the true and better priest, the true and better king, the true and better sacrifice, the true and better light, bread, and Jesus is the truth and better Joshua – who secures the Promised Land for us.

D. Well, this is something related but different. Here we are not looking at events where Christ was foreshadowed, we are looking at theophanies – events where God the Son makes an appearance before the incarnation.

- 1. Jesus was the angel that met with Abraham, before Sarah conceived. Jesus was the angel that wrestled with Jacob, Jesus was the fourth figure standing alongside Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego in the fiery furnace

E. Here Jesus appears as the Commander of the Army of the Lord. And we get several clues about this:

- 1. First, the fact that Joshua worships him. Angels are not to be worshipped, but Joshua worships this Angel and the angel accepts it. That alerts us to the fact that this is a theophany (or more technically, a Christophany). It is Jesus.
- 2. And second, Joshua is instructed to do the same thing Moses had been instructed to do when God had appeared to him in a different theophany – as the burning bush. Take off your shoes, for you place you are walking is holy.
 - a) This doesn’t make immediate sense to us, because for us taking off our shoes is something that we do when we are being casual. But it was a bit more like taking off your hat – showing respect. If you have ever entered a mosque you are required to take off your shoes. It’s an acknowledgment of holiness.

VI. Here is what you need to see:

A. This changes everything: Joshua now realizes, I’m not in charge. And we are going to win. God is keeping his promise:

- 1. Joshua 1:9 reads: Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”
- 2. This is now His battle. And by the way, there are a few other times when the Army of the Lord makes an appearance:
 - a) In 2 Kings 6 we have the event where Elisha and his young servant are surrounded by the army of Ben-Hadad, and when the servant goes to get water and sees them, he panics. And Elisha says, “no worries, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And then he prays that God will open his servants eyes to see, and he does and he is overwhelmed.

b) Later in 2 Kings, chapter 18, we read about how the angel of the Lord went out against the Assyrians who were lined up to attack Hezekiah. They had told him, “your God can’t protect you.” The text says the next day they found that the entire city had been surrounded but all of the Assyrians had been wiped out.

c) In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus tells Peter to put his sword down, saying, If I needed military help, I could call in legions of angels

3. The presence of the Lord has to go a long way towards helping Joshua relax.

B. Second – point two. Point one is that the arrival of the Angel of the Lord changes everything. Point two is, the arrival of the angel of the Lord changes everything.

1. Yes, I know, same point. But from a different angle. When Joshua finds out that God has arrived, he can trust that the battle will be won. But, he also needs to change his orientation.

2. We read that Joshua asks the Angel (Jesus): “Are you for us or for our enemies?” And the Angel of the Lord’s Army (Jesus) said “neither.” We should not try to recruit God to our side – to our cause. That doesn’t work, we need to support his cause.

3. Let me suggest that as you reset, you understand, while God is for you - we get that language in a variety of places. He loves you. He died for you. Let me suggest that following God is not about recruiting Him to your team. We sign on to His.

a) At the risk of agitating cat lovers everywhere – something I seem to do a few times a year – let me say, some of you act like a cat when you should be acting like a dog.

(1) You care for a dog. Feed it. Pet it. Rub its belly. Give it a place to sleep, and the dog thinks, “my owner is God.” And worships you.

(2) You care for a cat. Feed it. Pet it. Give it a place to sleep, and the cat thinks, “I must be a god,” and expects more worship.

(3) Don’t make that mistake.

4. Hear me – God is for you. I have been spending some time in the Parable of the Prodigal, and the most shocking part of that parable for the people of that day was that the father runs after the son. The son disses the dad. In effect tells him to die. He treats the father horribly. But the father loves the Son, watches for him and runs to him when he sees him approaching.

a) God is for you. He is for you. He made you in His image and sent his son to die for you. God is for you.

5. But do not be confused as to how things should unfold. God is god and you are not.

6. When Joshua asks this warrior – the fact that his sword is drawn suggests he is ready for battle. When Joshua asks, are you for us or them? The Angel says, that’s not the question. The question is not, am I with you, but are you with me?

7. We do not recruit God to our agenda, we sign up for His.

8. This is big. It felt to me more like a conversion experience than my conversion experience.

a) It took me a while to come to faith. And it didn’t include any memorable moment when I knew I was in.

9. But there came a moment, embarrassingly much later, when I realized,

a) It’s not about me. I needed to stop asking God to bless my plans and start asking Him to allow me to be part of his plans.

b) I need to stop telling him what he needs to do and ask him to do with me what makes sense.

10. Many Christians think they are signing up for a certain kind of deal. God, you bless me – with wealth and power and happiness and health – and I will give you credit. But... God doesn’t often give that deal. In part because it’s not because it’s not best for us. Giving us an easy life:

a) Is not the deal Job got.

b) It’s not the deal Jesus got.

c) It’s not the deal Paul got, or Peter or James or John.

d) I just recorded the online history lecture that comes out on Saturdays. Last week it was Justin Martyr – martyr was not his last name. He was an early church leader, wrote the first apology, and was killed for his faith. Next week it is Polycarp, a bishop in the area of Turkey, and a man who is killed for his faith.

11. Let me suggest that as you reset you take another look at the deal. It’s not “you believe in me and things will go the way you want them to.” Instead it’s, “God you are God and I will follow.”

C. Joshua approaches the man with the sword drawn now has to decide, is he going to listen to his fears or to the Lord.

1. And this is our situation

2. Lots of time we are scared – not of wolves, but of giving up control.

3. It’s worth asking, why would we fear trusting God. What is your view of God that you would not trust Him?

4. Joshua surrenders to God. Why would we not totally surrender to God?

5. He is an all good, loving God. He has demonstrated his love for us in sending his son

VII. This is a call to courage and action, and this is a call to be sure you are aligning your life around God’s agenda. The question isn’t, “Is God on my side?” But, am I on His?

VIII. If God is for us, who can be against us? He has made so many promises to Joshua – and us.