

Weekly Reflection – Joshua 5: “Are you asking the right question?”

Obedience can be risky.

In Joshua chapter five we find the Israelites are now in the Promised Land and the city of Jericho is right in front of them. God has supernaturally dried up the Jordan River so they could pass over on dry ground. We read in Joshua chapter five verse one that the enemy had heard that God had dried up the Jordan and ***“their hearts melted and there was no spirit in them.”*** This seems like an opportune time to conquer Jericho. Pretty sure the Israelites are fired up and their faith is high, and the enemy is scared. But what does God have Joshua do?

In Joshua 5:2-12 we see that God tells Joshua to circumcise all the males who had not been circumcised in the wilderness and then to celebrate Passover. Why these two things, circumcision and the Passover; why not wait until after Jericho has been conquered? It seems that the reason must be that God had something more important on His agenda than simply having the Israelites conquer Jericho and possess physical land. What was more important to God than simply having them take possession of some physical land, was their hearts, their relationship with Him, reminding them of what He was doing. What was more important to God was reminding and teaching them who He is, what He is like, who they are, the big mission they had been chosen for.

God instructs Joshua to circumcise the males and then after they have healed to celebrate Passover. And notice that Joshua was obedient, Joshua trusted God. But this is risky obedience from a human viewpoint. Let's incapacitate a good chunk of our army for a handful of days while we camp out between the flooded Jordan River and the enemy city of Jericho. From a human standpoint this leaves the Israelites in a vulnerable spot.

We need to trust that even when what God tells us to do doesn't make sense, or the timing seems off to us, we need to see that obedience is necessary if we are going to grow in our relationship with Him. It can feel easier, to “obey” God in our timing, when it makes sense to us. But is delayed obedience really obedience?

As much as circumcision and celebrating the Passover didn't really make sense in that moment, in their obedience they were reminded who God is, what God had promised, God's faithfulness, who they were as God's chosen people. God is always more concerned with His relationship with you than He is with how much you can get done for Him. God's timing and God's process is much more about our hearts than it is about how much we can accomplish for God.

“When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” Joshua 5:13-14 ESV

Who is this that Joshua encounters?

He's called the commander of the army of the Lord. Most scholars believe this is a Christophany, a visible manifestation or appearance of Christ before His human incarnation. A few reasons we can be confident of this:

- First, Joshua worships Him without being rebuked, and you're not allowed to worship an angel. (Revelation 22:8-9)
- Second, He's referred to as Lord in the next chapter. ("And the Lord said to Joshua...", Joshua 6:2)
- Third, the command to remove his sandals because where he was standing was holy, is clear proof that this is God.

The question and answer.

- Question: ***"Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"***
- Answer: ***"No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come."***

Did Joshua ask him a yes or no question? "No" means you're asking the wrong question. We see here that God still had something to teach or remind Joshua. The question is not, "Are you on my side?" The question should have been, "What are you doing, and how can I join you?" God is reminding Joshua that He chose them to join Him in His mission. They did not choose God to join them in their mission.

It is so easy for us to slip into that mindset that just invites God into our mission and our wants. One way we see this happening is when we take the Word of God and make it agree with us. We use the Word of God to support what we want to do, to validate how we want to live our lives. What we must do is take our lives and make them fit the Word of God. Not take the Word of God and make it fit our lives.

Jesus's mission was and is to save sinners, make disciples, and build His church. The most important question is not, "God are you on my side?" Rather, "God what are you doing, and how can I join You?"

He will use us.

God is the one doing the fighting in this battle. He doesn't need Joshua to fight the battle for Him. But God is going to use Joshua in the battle, and that is fundamentally different. What God will tell Joshua to do is walk around Jericho a bunch of times and then yell and blow trumpets and the walls will fall down. Now we know God didn't need the Israelites to walk around then yell and blow trumpets to knock the walls down. He could have done that all by Himself, but he chose to use Joshua and the Israelites.

There's a huge difference between receiving an extremely hard task that you're expected to accomplish; and being told to join and work alongside an expert to accomplish the task. God does not tell us to go make disciples for Him. He invites or commands us to join Him as He makes disciples of all nations.

Making Disciples

Do you remember the first thing Jesus told the disciples to do after He gave the commission to go and make disciples? ***"Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'"*** (Luke 24:45-49 ESV) What is this promise and power from on high? ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** (Acts 1:8 ESV) Wait for the promise and power of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because He wanted them to know that they would not make disciples and build the church for Him, He would do it through them. Did Jesus say,

“You will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” No. Jesus promised that He will build His church, and the gates of hell will not stop Him.

This is a completely different way to get out of bed in the morning. I wake up and ask, God what are you doing today? God where are you working today? I’m coming with You. Instead of waking up and saying, “Ok God, this my agenda today can you help me get it all done.” Jesus calls us to follow. He doesn’t need us to do anything for Him, but He desires to do impossible things through us if we will surrender and follow Him. Jesus did not come and die on the cross so you could invite Him into your life and your mission. Jesus came and died on the cross for you and me because He was and is on a mission to save the lost, to give eternal life to all who will believe in Him. And He invites us to join Him on that mission.

“And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my Lord say to his servant?” And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.” Joshua 5:14-15 ESV

How do we respond?

Right now, in this moment how will you respond? How did Joshua respond? Joshua worshipped, surrendered, and obeyed.

- Worshipped – ***“Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped.”***
 - Surrendered – ***“What does my Lord say to his servant?”***
 - Obeyed – ***“And Joshua did so.”***
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- Will you worship Him?
 - Will you surrender to the Lord and ask, “What does the Lord say to His servant?”
 - Will you obey?