

Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

HOLINESS COMES FIRST (JOSHUA 5:13-15)

I. Joshua Ben-Nun—God’s Man for the Times

II. Joshua Meets an Armed Stranger (Joshua 5:13)

- A. When Joshua 5:13 opens, “Joshua was by Jericho.”
1. “[B]y Jericho” could mean that Joshua was in the Israelite camp near the border of Jericho.
 2. “[B]y Jericho” could also mean that Joshua was physically quite near the city of Jericho itself when this incident happened.
—Joshua may have left the Israelite camp on a reconnaissance mission.
- B. Joshua happens to look up to higher ground; and lo and behold, standing before him, was this man with “his drawn sword in his hand.”
- C. How do you think Joshua would have reacted as a soldier?
- D. Joshua challenges the man with a question: “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” (v 13)

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Where is Joshua located when 5:13 opens? (2) What does Joshua see when “he lifted up his eyes and looked”? (3) What does Joshua say to the man?

III. The Commander of the Lord’s Army (Joshua 5:14)

- A. The stranger’s response is something Joshua probably did not expect to hear.
1. When the man says “No,” he is obviously addressing the question Joshua had asked: “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”
 2. In saying “No,” the man means that he is on neither side.
 3. The man has a side of his own—he is “the commander of the army of the LORD.”
- B. Two questions arise at this point.
1. What is this army of the Lord?
 2. Why would the leader of the Lord’s army say he is not for Israel?

- C. To understand what the army of the Lord is, there are a number of factors have to be accounted for.
1. The army of the Lord cannot refer to Israel in this instance, because the commander has already said that he is not for Israel.
 2. Another set of factors to be considered is how Joshua himself responds to this commander. Later...
 - a. Joshua bows to the commander.
 - b. Joshua calls him “my lord.”
 - c. Joshua removes his sandals because the ground had become holy.
 3. That last factor (2(c)) is important because the last time a chosen leader of Israel was asked to remove his sandals out of respect for holy ground was Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3).
 4. All those clues help us to determine what exactly the army of the Lord is.

—The army of the Lord is the army of heaven. Its commander is a heavenly being.

- D. Why would the leader of God’s army say that he is neither for Israel nor for Canaan?

1. We know from chapter one that the Lord had already promised to be with Joshua.
 - a. 1:3: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon *I have given to you*, just as I promised to Moses.”
 - b. 3:7: “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so *I will be with you*.”
2. Given all these promises, why does the commander of the Lord’s army say he is not for Israel?
 - a. Scripture does not give us an immediate answer at this point.
 - b. The commander does not explain his words.
 - c. It is possible that the commander was answering on the basis of ultimate allegiance.

—He was talking about where his own loyalties lie.
 - d. While the heavenly army will assist the army of Joshua, it will do so out of loyalty to God, not Israel!

- E. The arrival of this heavenly commander is a highly significant event.

1. It is a reminder to Joshua and to the Israelites that there are conditions within the relationship between God and Israel.
2. Yes, Israel’s relationship with God is secure.
3. But Israel’s success at the upcoming war depends on obedience.

—The Lord God is only for those who are ultimately for him.

- F. The words of the heavenly commander confront us with the question: *Whose side are we ultimately on?*

1. Often, we confuse our agenda with God’s.
 - a. We use God’s Name to endorse our own plans and ambitions. This happens...

- i. whenever Christian workers neglect their own families on the grounds that they are doing God’s work;
 - ii. whenever we hastily equate their strong convictions with God’s will;
 - iii. whenever we use particular Bible passages in ways that violate larger Biblical principles of justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Mt 23:23).
2. God is not saying that we cannot have plans for our own lives. —But he calls us to submit our plans to him.
 3. What drives your life today? Is it a desire to appear good to others? Is it a fear of what others may think? The Lord calls you and me to seek first his honor. Only then, are we in a position to do anything else.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the man mean when he says “No” to Joshua’s original question? (2) What is the army of the Lord? What factors do we have to take into account? (3) Why would the leader of God’s army say that he is neither for Israel nor for Canaan? (4) Why is the arrival of the heavenly commander so significant? (5) Whose side are you on today? What motivates you? In what ways have you confused your plans with God’s?

IV. “Take Off Your Sandals” (Joshua 5:15)

- A. Verse 15 is the commander’s response to Joshua’s question: “...‘*Take off your sandals* from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’”
- B. Isn’t it fascinating that the very first instruction is for Joshua to remove his sandals out of respect for holy ground?
- C. We need to read Joshua 5:15 alongside Exodus 3:1-5 to appreciate the significance of the former.
 1. In Exodus 3, YHWH comes to Moses in the form of fire in a bush.
 - a. God says to Moses in Exodus 3:5: “Then he said, “Do not come near; *take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*”
 - b. Both Exodus 3 and Joshua 5 involve...
 - i. God’s appointed leader for Israel.
 - ii. a heavenly being, who speaks for God.
 - iii. the prophets removing their sandals, because the ground that they stood on had become holy ground.
 2. The fact that Joshua’s encounter with the heavenly commander is so similar to Moses’ encounter with the angel of the Lord is no coincidence.
 - a. It shows that Joshua has been specifically chosen by the Lord himself, just as Moses once was.
 - b. Yet again, Joshua’s authority as the great prophet-leader of Israel is reaffirmed.

- c. But more than that, it teaches us that the most important work that God’s people must do is to worship God.
- D. This scene of Joshua bowing himself is itself an instruction from God. —God is teaching us that worship is the most fundamental project of his holy society.
- E. Joshua does as he is told—“And Joshua did so.”
 - 1. This small phrase is loaded with significance, because it comes after so many statements about Joshua’s devotion to the Lord.
 - 2. Ever since chapter one, Joshua has obeyed every letter of God’s Word.
- F. Joshua’s faithful behavior is also representative of this new generation of Israelites, who follow his lead. —Unlike their forefathers who failed to trust God and revere him, Joshua and his generation will obey the Lord and plant his Kingdom in the soil of Canaan.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the heavenly commander instruct Joshua to do? (2) How are the manifestations of God similar in Exodus 3 and Joshua 5? What does this say about Joshua? (3) “And Joshua did so.” See in light of all the statements of Joshua’s obedience, why are these words important? (4) How is Joshua’s faithful behavior representative of the new generation of Israelites?

V. We Have a Prophet Greater than Joshua

- A. God has given us a much greater leader than even Joshua. He has given us the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. How is the prophet Jesus greater than the prophet Joshua? The Lord Jesus is greater for three very important, very glorious, reasons.
 - 1. Jesus is greater because he himself is *the almighty God*. —Jesus is Joshua’s divine Master—the One to whom he bowed.
 - 2. Jesus is *the perfect Israelite and the perfect human being*.
 - a. As righteous as Joshua was, Joshua was still a sinner.
 - b. Jesus is righteousness in all its fullness.
 - 3. Jesus is *the ultimate Savior*.
 - a. Christ has achieved full reconciliation between God and humankind by his life, death, and resurrection.
 - b. Christ has also overcome our greatest enemies. —These are not the Canaanites, but the very gods of Canaan themselves (Eph 6:12).
 - c. While Joshua was mostly a good leader, even he does not bring his people into complete and lasting rest (Josh 13:1).
 - d. Joshua is but one step along the road that ends in Christ.
- C. In light of Joshua’s limitations, it is only right that all eyes today look, not to Joshua, but to Christ. —This is what Hebrews 1:1-2 advises us to do: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these

last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How is Jesus Christ a great prophet-leader than Joshua? (2) Based on Hebrews 1:1-2, how are we to understand the relationship between the prophet Joshua and Christ, the Son of God?

VI. We Choose Holiness First

We can choose devotion to God first, because Christ has already made us God’s holy people—and this status cannot be removed.

- A. What does it mean to choose holiness first? What does it mean to be devoted to God above and beyond everything else?
- B. *Choosing holiness first means cherishing the supremacy of our God above all things.*
 - 1. We see this in Joshua’s own response to the heavenly commander.
 - 2. The moment the commander introduced himself, Joshua bowed himself.
 - 3. Joshua knew that the commander represented YHWH.
 - 4. Joshua already knew who YHWH was
 - He was the true Creator of the heavens and the earth, and therefore, the rightful Master of all the nations, including those Israel is about to fight.
 - 5. Before we can do anything of use to God, we must have a right understanding and reverent affection for him.
- C. *Choosing holiness first means being wholly available to God.*
 - 1. Once Joshua bows, he asks, “What does my lord say to his servant?”
 - 2. Holiness does not care about whether or not God’s will inconveniences us.
 - It only cares that God’s will is done.
 - 3. This is where the great Christian battle is today: It is the fight to love God’s will above our own.
 - a. Paul captures the intensity of this conflict very well in Galatians 5:17: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh...”
 - b. Because each of us still has sin dwelling within us, we will not always see the superior worth of God’s will.
 - c. And yet, it is because we are already holy in Christ that we must strive for God’s will above all.
 - 4. Some diagnostic questions:
 - a. Where in your life do you still need greater conformity to God’s will?
 - b. Where in your life do you need the courage to even begin seeking God’s will?
 - 5. The strength to do God’s will comes from above.
 - And so we ask God to enable us to love his will above our own.

- D. *Choosing holiness first ends in the attainment of holiness itself.*
1. After Joshua asked, “What does my lord say to his servant?” he went on to do what the commander asked him to do.
 2. The will of God must be applied in every corner of our lives.
 - a. Little children, God wants you to honor your parents.
 - b. Students, God calls you to serve him with your training.
 - c. Parents, God calls you to work with him to nurture the likeness of Christ in your children.
 - d. Church officers and leaders, God call you to renounce all selfish ambitions and to form his Kingdom in his people.
- E. Lest we think that the fate of the Kingdom rests on us, know that it does not.
1. The biggest player in our lives is not us, but the Lord himself.
 2. Our heavenly Father promises that those who belong to him will attain holiness, not in this world, but in the world to come.
—Philippians 1:6: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you *will bring it to completion* at the day of Jesus Christ.”
 3. Even when we slip in our Christian life, God does not give up on us.
 4. God may very well discipline us—and that discipline can be painful.
 5. But the Lord has taken personal responsibility for each and every one of us.
 6. We can say with Paul: “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also *glorified*” (Rom 8:30).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why must we choose holiness first? (2) What does it mean to choose holiness first? (3) What is the greatest struggle in the Christian life? (4) Where in your life do you still need greater conformity to God’s will? (5) Where in your life do you need the courage to even begin seeking God’s will? (6) What comfort and encouragement does Philippians 1:6 give to us?