

Message #9

Joshua 5:13-15

Martin Luther, the famed Reformer, who accomplished so much for God, said this:

“We are nothing worth with all our gifts and qualities, how great soever they be, unless God continually hold his hand over us: if he forsake us, then are our wisdom, art, sense and understanding futile. If he does not constantly aid us, then our highest knowledge and experience in divinity, or what else we attain unto, will nothing serve; for when the hour of trial and temptation comes, we shall be dispatched in a moment, the devil, through his craft and subtlety, tearing away from us even those texts in Holy Scriptures wherewith we should comfort ourselves, and setting before our eyes, instead, only sentences of fearful threatening. Wherefore, let no man proudly boast and brag of his own righteousness, wisdom or other gifts and qualities, but humble himself, and pray with the holy apostles and say: Ah Lord! Strengthen and increase the faith in us!” (*Table Talk*, pp. 58-59).

Luther realized that no matter what one accomplished, without God continually caring and aiding and guiding and enabling, nothing is really accomplished.

That lesson is one all of God’s people need to know. That is a lesson Israel needed to know. If you listen to that which comes out of Israel today, it would appear that her trust and confidence is in herself, not God. The nation seems to truly believe that it is within their power to bring about everlasting peace. Israel seems to think that she has the power to negotiate for her Promised Land. **But it has never been in Israel’s power to get that land because the power belongs to God. Until Israel gets to the place where she realizes this, she will not have the Land and she will not have the blessings of God.**

It is a shame that the religious and political leaders of Israel don’t turn back to carefully study the book of Joshua. If they did, they would see that the key to her receiving her land is her relationship with God. What we see in these verses is so critical:

NO MATTER HOW MUCH ONE HAS SEEN GOD WORK PREVIOUSLY, NO FUTURE VICTORY CAN OCCUR UNTIL GOD’S PEOPLE REVERENCE GOD AND REALIZE THAT VICTORY BELONGS TO GOD AND DEPENDS COMPLETELY UPON GOD.

This key point has not only been lost in Israel, it has been lost in the church. Churches are doing all kinds of things to move forward and to increase numbers. Very few depend on God and truly reverence God.

I do not think it is even possible to prepare a message without the leading and work of God. I do not think it is possible to select a minister that is truly God’s choice without a dependency on God. When many churches look for a minister, they look to a resume. They look more at what has taken place academically more than what has taken place spiritually.

But unless the man has a deep reverence for God and His Word and is completely dependent upon God and His Word, he could have every degree known to man, but will get nowhere in going forward for God.

This is the story of Joshua. Let's remember the context. Israel has just seen God do the miraculous and the dramatic. God had parted the Jordan and she crossed it and went to Gilgal. At Gilgal, some wonderful, meaningful things happened—circumcision was reinstated; the Passover was reinstated and new blessings were enjoyed. If you are Joshua and the people of Israel, you cannot help but feel good about all that had happened.

The Israelites are finally in the land and proper worship has been restored. **It was right at this point when God needed to communicate a very important point—you will not go any further without Me!**

This is why these verses are so critical. God needed to remind Joshua and His people that He was in charge, they weren't. He was the key to their victory. He was the key to their success. There are six historical facts we want to point out that clearly communicates this point:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – A man appeared to Joshua when he was by Jericho. **5:13a**

Joshua was obviously out scouting Jericho. He was looking at it and analyzing it. Jericho would not be an easy city to take. It had a very impressive wall that surrounded the city and it had the finest Canaanite military weaponry. The only weapons the Israelites had were slings, spears, bows and arrows and some flint knives. That is not much fire power when you are going up against a city like Jericho.

Joshua had left the confines of Gilgal and was somewhere near Jericho when this episode occurred. Even in the light of all Joshua had seen, he was not about to sit still. He was ready to go, he was ready to move, he was ready to begin to take the land; but he was also doing his homework. Dr. Irving Jensen said Joshua thought of one thing—his responsibility in the battle.

Now probably as he is looking at the city he is trying to figure out what he needs to take it. Special ops military forces systematically assess the enemy to determine the best way to attack. He is probably asking questions such as: 1) Are there weak points in the walls of the city? 2) How many ladders would we need? 3) Are there areas we can secretly sneak in and batter in doors? 4) Are there places we can scale the walls?

Now I find this more than just interesting. God is going to miraculously appear to Joshua when Joshua is doing something. Joshua knew the task was to take the land and he was actively pursuing this with everything he humanly knew to do. That is when we can expect to see God work in dramatic ways.

God stands ready to help His people to move forward to accomplish His will, but He also expects His people to move. You cannot expect God to help you with an exam if you don't study.

You cannot expect God to help you get a job if you don't apply. You cannot expect God to help you lose weight if you don't exercise.

You cannot expect God to help you earn more money if you don't work. You cannot expect God to help you increase your barns with plenty if you don't give. This is the lesson Joshua learned and it is the same lesson we need to learn.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – The man appeared opposite of Joshua with his sword drawn. **5:13b**

When Joshua first saw this man, he was standing between Joshua and Jericho. He looked like a typical man who was obviously combat ready. There does not seem to be anything about the appearance of this man that was odd. It may be the drawn sword is what caught Joshua's attention.

With the sword drawn, Joshua would have immediately realized that this man was connected to the battle—either for Israel or for the Canaanites. There were no neutral soldiers on this battlefield. You were either for one group or you were for the other group.

This man, as you will see, is not your normal man. This turns out to be an O.T. appearance of Jesus Christ (Theophany). The point to see is that He has His sword drawn. There are some who make Jesus Christ out to be some pacifistic, gentle, religious teddy bear. Do not miss this text. Jesus Christ is a soldier. He is a warrior and He is ready to go to war for His people.

Now certainly we will admit that this has specific reference to Israel; however, He also reveals Himself to be this kind of Person to the seven churches in Revelation. To the church of Pergamum, He identifies Himself as “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword.” To the church of Thyatira, He identifies Himself as “the One who has eyes like a flame of fire.”

We may be sure of this; if Jesus Christ was willing to go to the cross for us, He is ready to go to war for us and to lead us to victory.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – The man was questioned by Joshua concerning his allegiance.
5:13c

Joshua did not know this man and he did not know what side he was on. He was not afraid of him initially, even though he had his sword drawn. Joshua went right up to the man and he looked him in the eye and said, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” Are you for the Israelites or are you for the Canaanites?

The fact that he was armed and ready to fight did not scare Joshua because he too was ready. He simply wanted to know what side He was on. This man was holding a drawn sword and there weren't too many of those around the Israelite camp who looked like that. Joshua asks this man a direct question and even though it will not be directly answered by the man, Joshua will learn the point God wants him to learn.

The thing that stands out about Joshua is how seriously and personally he took this situation. Here is a man with a sword drawn and he is obviously out of the boundary limits of the camp of Israel and out of the boundary limits of Jericho.

Joshua believed it was his responsibility to get the truth concerning this man. He may be just one man, but Joshua takes them one-at-a-time, which is the mark of a good soldier. We may observe that God never chides Joshua for asking this question. In fact, it is probably one of the qualities that make Joshua such a great leader.

There are times when someone needs to be confronted and it is the mark of great leadership to confront. Joshua does not turn his head to this guy. He confronts him, realizing he has a job to do and by his own human action, nothing will stop his mission. For all he knew he was talking to a Canaanite or Amorite.

When you are in war, you need straightforward, loyal soldiers who will stand up for what is right and will fight for the true cause of God.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – The man responds to the questions of Joshua. **5:14a**

The man simply said, “I come now as captain of the host of the LORD.” In other words, not only am I for Israel, I am the One who is authorized by God to come and lead you to victory. Notice carefully “I indeed come now.” Do not overlook this. This was His status now.

When this man came here in Joshua, he came as captain of the host of the LORD. When this man comes at a later time, He comes as a Lamb for slaughter. When He comes a final time, He will come as King of the world.

Think of what this man says to Joshua by way of implication. I have an entire force of heaven under my authority and I am on your side and My sword is drawn and we are ready to fight with you and for you.

This sword from heaven is drawn and we are ready as the host of heaven to go to war to fight and win. This man will not ever visibly or physically replace Joshua. This host will not negate Israel’s responsibility. But Joshua could know that all of heaven was with him.

The Canaanites had controlled the land for some time, but that was about to end. It had taken many years, but judgment had come and the host of heaven was ready to carry out the Divine plan for victory.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Joshua responds to the man with the drawn sword. **5:14b**

When this man informed Joshua of who he was, Joshua responded in two ways:

Response #1 - Joshua responded physically. **5:14b**

Joshua fell to the ground on his face and bowed down. Joshua realized he was in the presence of the power of God and, as great a leader as he was, as powerful a man as he was he was bowed down before God. Those who bow before God will be honored by God.

Response #2 - Joshua responded verbally. **5:14c**

Joshua said, “I am your servant, say what you want.” Joshua not only reverences God, but he is willing to submit himself to whatever God’s Word told him to do. No one will ever become great who is not willing to submit himself to the Word of God. This is a key to being a great leader.

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – The man verbally responds to Joshua. **5:15**

Now the captain of the LORD’s host said something to Joshua that was very similar to something that had been said to Moses (Ex. 3:5): “Remove your sandals from your feet for the place you are standing is holy.”

Now whenever you have this kind of language being stated, the presence of God is there.

Now if we carefully look at this context, I think we will easily discern who this man is:

- 1) Joshua falls down before this man in a worshipful, reverent manner and this man accepts this.
- 2) Joshua identifies this man as “my Lord,” which refers to Him being his sovereign master.
- 3) Joshua identifies himself as being His servant.
- 4) Joshua must remove his sandals because the place is so holy.

Taking all of these things into consideration, **what we have here is the Presence of God in the Person of the captain of the LORD’S host.**

Now the question may be asked, what member of the Godhead appears in human form? We know from Ex. 33:20 that you cannot see God’s face and live. We know from John 1:18 that no man had seen God at any time. We know from John 14:9 that when one sees Jesus Christ, one sees God.

The answer to who this captain is becomes clear—this is God the Son. What we have here is called in theology a theophany, which is an O.T. appearance of Jesus Christ prior to His incarnation.

Joshua is bowing down at the feet of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was about to personally lead Joshua and Israel into this Promised Land to fight so that Israel could have her land. Jesus Christ was no idle spectator in this war; he was leading the charge.

It was Joshua’s job to prepare for battle, but victory in the battle belonged solely to the Lord.

Practical Lesson:

- 1) God's people must first reverence God and His Word if they want victory.
- 2) God's people must do everything they can to prepare for whatever task they undertake.
- 3) God's people must realize that victory or defeat is directly connected to their dependency on God.
- 4) With Jesus Christ in our life, we have the potential of accomplishing powerful things and experiencing tremendous victories.