



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

An Ever Present God

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Joshua 5:13-15

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¹³ 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?" ¹⁴ 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?" ¹⁵ 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.

(Pastor prays)

Being overwhelmed is a terrible thing, to feel the pressure of anxiety or the weight of the world, to sense that there's no way out, no way forward and no help coming can be soul crushing. Even if you are a believer and know that my help comes from the Lord, it can genuinely feel like that help is slow in coming. Your chest feels heavy. Your mind feels numb. And your heart just hurts. And you wonder with the Revelator, how long O Lord for the faithful and true? How long do I have to fight this battle and cry these tears and feel this burden because the truth of the matter is that godly living and Christian responsibility can be a lonely endeavor. I think that for all of us that carries some of that, this paragraph is filled with significant instructions. Let's get up to speed. God has brought his people through the wilderness. They walked through the Jordan on dry ground. He spiritually prepared them through circumcision and the Passover and now they have a monumental task in front of them. Jericho awaits. That fortified and walled city are the first obstacles that stand between them and the promised land and the writer brings us to the leader Joshua as he weighs what lies ahead. Joshua is going to learn something we all need to hold onto.

No Matter the Challenge, our God Always Gets Us Through

Let's find out some things about our good God.

Our God is present

Go with me to verse 13 and get the feel of the scene. ¹³ *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?"* The army of Israel is just before engaging in a hard conflict with an untried leader. Who knows whether this man Joshua is taking us in the right direction? Behind Joshua was the Jordan river that kept him from retreating and in front of him was fortress Jericho that forbade his advance. He had never seen a walled city before. In this scene we find Joshua starting to feel the weight of responsibility and the uncertain future that lies ahead. When you read the verse, the way it's written indicates that Joshua has gone aside to think and meditate on what his next step would be. He is by Jericho and he lifted up his eyes and behold, a man was standing before him. Let's pause here and think who that man is. No one really knows. Was he an Angel, preincarnate Jesus, as Jesus was the 4th man in the fiery furnace with the Hebrew children? What we do know is that this is some sort of representation of God himself. Now with that in mind back up and get a running start. Joshua is out by himself looking at the vexing problem of Jericho and as he looked at his problem there he met his God. It because our God is present, he's here. And he's most present in our greatest challenge. He's here when you don't have easy answers and cliches won't do and relief doesn't come. God uses the weight of a burden, the anxiety of a problem, the pain of a tragedy, the sting of betrayal to lift your eyes up and see him. Isn't that what David said in the 23rd Psalm? Have you memorized that yet? Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me. Isn't that what God told Joshua in Joshua 1: 9? *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*" it's one thing to hear that, it's another thing to believe it and still another to trust it. Let me make a couple of suggestions. Read the Bible so you will know. Remember the promises and passages. Repent when you have not trusted or are angry or are sinful. Open your mouth and pray and ask God to fix the problem and strengthen your faith. Because our God is present.

Our God is dangerous

I want to be careful how I say this because I don't want to overstate my case. But I do think it needs to be said. Let me show you where I get it. Look what Joshua sees in verse 13. *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?"* The man standing there with his drawn sword in his hand, here is the picture of a warrior whose sword is out of its sheath and the warrior is in the offensive position of battle. It's the same picture you find in Numbers 22 when Balaam argues with a donkey. His donkey sees the Angel of the Lord with a drawn sword. Or in first Chronicles 21, when David had sinned and the Angel of the Lord came with drawn sword. It's a picture of danger and judgment and even vengeance, but it's a vengeance and judgment that is reserved for his enemies. It's important to remember that about the God of the Bible. It's a truth that is probably best characterized by C. S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. When Susan asked Mr Beaver about Aslan the lion, is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. Safe? Said the Beaver. Oh no dear child, he is not safe but he is good. And that's the beauty of the gospel. That at the cross, the love of God saves us from the judgment of God through Jesus the son of God. It goes like this. God is the holy creator that created all of us in his image. That image in you has been disfigured by your own sin and that sin is so heinous that you can't get to God and God will not fellowship with you in your sin. That's judgment. But because of the love of God, He gives us Jesus Christ who is fully God and fully man who lived completely perfect in a way that you and I can't. He kept all of God's law, earning righteousness. And at the cross of Jesus. He takes our sin, paying for it, that's the judgment, and gives us his righteousness. There's the love of God, so that any sinner that believes the Gospel, repenting and believing, the Bible teaches that you will be saved.

Our God is present and dangerous and fights for his people. But Joshua wasn't sure and that leads me to the next point.

Our God is bigger

Let's join the conversation between Joshua and the visitor and look at the question. ¹³ *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?"* ¹⁴ *And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come."* Joshua Asked, Are you for us or for them? What a narrow minded, self-

centered question. It is saying, I have a plan and agenda and I want you to fit into it. Join us or step aside. And the Angel of the Lord just completely rebukes him. Let's go back and read.

¹³ *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?"* ¹⁴ *And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come."* Joshua, you got it all wrong. You've asked the wrong question. I have not come to take sides; I have come to take over! The visitor didn't fit Joshua's categories because his category had to do with winning or losing, us or them, for or against. And the visitor let him know that he was much bigger than any category that Joshua might try to put him in. Just as he is much bigger than any category that we might put him in. He's bigger than our wants, our favorites, our desires or our plans. We used to sing the song, the God of Angel armies is always by my side. But the truth is, we need to make sure we are on his side. We need to put our faith in a crucified resurrected savior, daily submitting to God, living for his glory, more worried about my sin than other peoples and seeking to please the Lord in my private life. It's true that no matter the challenge our God will get us through. Our God is present. Our God is dangerous. Our God is bigger.

Our God is to be worshipped

Look at Joshua's response of worship in verse 14. *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?"* God directs our path, God directs the strategy, God takes the initiative and God sets the terms. And our job is to worship. There are three things about Joshua's attitude that I think we can learn from and are worth noting.

There needs to be humility in worship. Joshua bows down. It is a complete surrendering of self will, self-pride, self-preservation and selfish desires.

There needs to be a readiness to serve. Look at what Joshua says. *"What does my lord say to his servant?"* Here is a familiar Old Testament response to a theophany. God showing himself. And Samuel he says speak Lord, your servant is listening. Or Isaiah when he said here I am Lord, send me. Verse 14 says my Lord. It is recognizing that he is God and you are not. Its total submission, total dependence, and total worship. It is a joyful giving over of the need for

control and rejoicing in trust that your good God is in fact in control. I want to put one more point on top of this and close with it.

Our God is holy

Our God is holy but don't divorce His Holiness from his kindness. It's a kind holiness. Look what he tells Joshua in verse 15. ¹⁵*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.* God reminds Joshua that the dominant characteristic is the holiness of God. It's why we need the cross. But embedded in this statement of holiness is a promise. You see this is the exact same thing that God told Moses when he was first called to lead. Here is the promise. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. And just as he was with Joshua, so will he be with us.

No matter the challenge, our God always gets us through. Our God is present. Our God is dangerous. Our God is bigger. Our God is to be worshipped. Our God is holy.

(Pastor prays)