

Joshua 5:13 – 6:5, 20.

¹³ 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?" ¹⁴ "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?" ¹⁵ 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. Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. ² Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in." ²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

We are to live and act in faith

- 1. A faith that approaches God with humility.**
- 2. A faith that trusts in the LORD.**
- 3. A faith that will be rewarded by God's faithfulness.**

He was the leader of Israel and a former spy. He was a respected soldier and now a general leading the Israelites into battle; but above all he was a man of faith. Joshua had a pretty good idea of the challenges facing him. He knew of the sturdy walls of Jericho. He had received reports of the tight defenses that Jericho had been keeping. No one was going in, no one was going out. His experience had to tell him this was going to be difficult, maybe a part of him thought it would be impossible, but in faith he trusted in the LORD. The LORD had promised his people victory and so they marched on towards the Promised Land, in faith he led the people towards Jericho. And his faith would inspire a whole army, a whole nation to act in faith, and to trust in the LORD. God gave him the instructions and he believed them and he would follow them. Joshua acted in faith. A faith that approached God with humility. A faith that trusted in the LORD. A faith that was rewarded by God's faithfulness.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we take special time to consider the brave men and women who served our country and were willing to risk and give up their lives. As we recall their sacrifice, we also think about those who went about this duty in faith. Many, many, Christian soldiers gave their lives to preserve the many freedoms that we enjoy. Men and women who not only served their country, but also faithfully served their LORD. They serve as an example and an inspiration for us so that we too, may take on whatever may come, in faith. May we too trust in the LORD and rely on him even in the most difficult and trying circumstances.

As Joshua marches towards Jericho we are told that he looked up and instead of seeing only the foreboding walls of Jericho, by God's power, instead he sees the commander of the LORD's army with sword in hand. Instead of the challenge, instead of the wall, instead of the impossible obstacle before him, he saw the presence of his mighty LORD. This man that he sees may have been an angel, or it may have been the angel of the LORD, that is the pre-incarnate Christ, who is referred to here as the commander of the LORD's army. Whatever the case may be, this is a being sent from God, and as he stands before Joshua, he stands at the ready, sword drawn and in his hand.

Notice the way that Joshua approaches this man, this mysterious being who stands before him. He approaches with boldness, yet with humility and respect. As he approached this man whose sword was drawn, he asks the simple question, ***"Are you for us or for our enemies?"*** And when the man replies that he is the commander of the LORD's army, Joshua does not immediately assume that this man is there to help him and give him and his people special treatment. But rather he falls down in reverence to the LORD. In fact, we are told, that Joshua bowed down low with his face to the ground in deep humility and reverence and asked, ***"What message does my Lord have for his servant?"*** And when the commander asked him to take off his sandals in reverence to the LORD, Joshua quickly complied.

As we face difficulties and challenges in our life, how do we approach God? Do we come in humility and reverence or are there times that we assume that God should just help us in the way that we have decided is right? Are there times when we try to oppose our will on God? God certainly wants us to come with confidence, he wants us to know that the LORD is there to hear us and help us, but are there times that we approach God in a way that teeters on arrogance? We come before him with minds made up that this is how God should help me!

Let us learn from Joshua to approach God with reverence and respect, with a humble faith, that trusts the LORD, but always remembers who is in charge, and who has top rank and command in our lives. Even though Joshua was the general of the Israelites, even though he was chosen leader that the LORD had placed over his people Israel to lead them into the Promised Land, he knew where he ranked in regard to the LORD. He was a sinner, he did not for one second assume that God should show him special treatment, or bow to his will, and meet his need. But he bowed low before the

presence of the LORD's servant and showed God the honor and respect that He deserved as he was allowed into the LORD's presence.

We too, of course, are sinners. We do not deserve to have God on our side. We do not deserve to be able to approach the Almighty God and have him attend to our troubles. For all that we have done and left undone we should be tried and sentenced to eternal punishment. We deserve only that He should strike us down with his holy sword of justice for we have daily rebelled against his commands and have refused to follow his orders. We should be dishonorably discharged and we should be sent away from his presence in our shame and disgrace for all time. And yet God in his mercy, regards us as his own. In his mercy he forgives us and welcomes us into his presence. He forgives and reinstates us, so that we are not only members of his kingdom, but we are children of his grace. With humility and respect we approach our God in faith.

Knowing what we deserve and yet what special privileges he gives us properly adjusts and tempers our expectations and our approach before our holy God. He is the LORD, we are sinners. We approach him in the privileged grace of prayer and petition. We make our requests to God, but finally we are to bow to his holy will. Your will be done is not just an empty phrase we slap onto the end of the prayer, but it is to be an attitude of our faith. We trust the LORD. We pray for that prayer to be answered, for that problem to be fixed, for that obstacle to ministry to be taken away, for financial burdens to be lessened, for illness to pass, for death to be fended off; or a person might even pray for suffering to end and for heaven to come, but in the end we are to put it all squarely in the LORD's hands. We are to live and act in faith as we trust in the LORD. We are to remember that we do not outrank God, but that we are subject to his good and gracious command and to his perfect and holy will. He leads. He is in charge of all. And in his power and wisdom he alone knows what is best. With a faith that expresses humility and reverence let us approach our God.

But then let us look up to him in a faith that fully trusts the LORD. As Joshua approached Jericho he no doubt had a sense of the challenges before him. He was aware of their defenses and their strengths, but in faith he looked to God and trusted in his almighty power. He trusted that no matter the odds he had his faithful and powerful God at his side. Even when the LORD gave him some unique marching orders Joshua put his trust in the LORD and his faith was ultimately rewarded.

In times of difficulty or uncertainty when we look up what do we see? Is it not the case that all too often we can't see past the next obstacle, the sickness, the problem, the issue, or the rut that is in front of us? Many times we don't lift our eyes high enough to see our God, do we? We can't see over that wall, that loss, that problem. In times of difficulty it is a struggle for us to take a step back and look up to see our God because we are so close to the problem, so absorbed by the issue. But God has called us to believe in Him, no matter the circumstance. Take a step back, look up, and trust in the LORD. The LORD of heaven and earth is on our side. He rules and governs all things for the good of those who love him. We can call on him, we can trust in him, in every circumstance of life, no matter how challenging!

Chris Tomlin, a contemporary Christian singer song writer, sings a song that proclaims this truth about God in a powerful way. He writes, *You crush the enemy, Underneath my feet, You are my sword and shield, Though trouble linger still, Whom shall I fear? I know who goes before me, I know who stands behind, The God of angel armies is always by my side, The One who reigns forever, He is a friend of mine, The God of angel armies is always by my side.* A couple of things grab my attention in both this song and Joshua's situation. Our LORD God is powerful! He is worthy to be trusted. He promises to go before, stand behind and beside us, because he has chosen us, and called us to be his people. What grace! What an undeserved and powerful truth this is! ***The God of angel armies is always by my side!*** And yet many times he does not just magically take things away. He still allows us to go through difficulty to strengthen us and then, of course, God answers in the way that he sees fit. In the song, Mr. Tomlin, proclaims. ***You are my sword and shield, though trouble linger still, whom shall I fear?***

After Joshua met with that commander of the angel army, he still had to go out and take on that challenge. He still had to walk around that wall. He still had to act in faith. For a number of days, for a whole week, Joshua waited for his Lord's promise to be fulfilled. There will be times when trouble lingers, when we are tested, for days and weeks, even longer, trouble lingers and we will have to act in faith. And God might not tear down the wall that we want him to, he may not cure that illness, he might not spare that loved one from death, he may not bring the type of relief that we had wanted or asked for, but knowing that our God and LORD is in control, we trust in him. And that trust will be rewarded as He will guide us through every challenge, every difficult time, every moment of fear or uncertainty, sorrow or pain, and he will lead us into the ultimate Promised Land of heaven.

As we heard from the book of James in our 2nd lesson. ***Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*** Love the LORD, Trust in him. Live and act in faith. Approach your God with a humble and yet confident faith. The one who reigns forever has in his grace chosen to be a friend of yours and mine. The one who lived, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven for you, is also the God of angel armies and He is always by our side. Amen.