

Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace

The Encounter

Joshua 5:13-15

July 27, 2025

HDBC

Before sending the Allied troops into Europe on D-day, Supreme Commander General Eisenhower wrote two documents. The first was typed on official letterhead. The second was handwritten on a blank piece of paper. Each one signed by Eisenhower.

The first was to rally the troops and to give them courage. The second was only to be delivered if the invasion failed. These two, taken together shed light on the great weight that any military leader must feel before sending troops into battle. Here is what he wrote.

Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are

marching together to Victory!

*I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle.
We will accept nothing less than full Victory!*

*Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this
great and noble undertaking.*

The second was only to be delivered if the invasion had failed.

*Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory
foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time
and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the
air and the Navy did all that Bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any
blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.*

It is obvious that he felt the great weight of making such a momentous decision. He had given the order to send tens of thousands of men into battle, knowing that the cost would be great. He had done all he could to prepare for that moment, and now the time had come to go.

Joshua must have felt a similar weight. He has done everything God required him to do to prepare for the battles to come. He has followed the Lord's instructions step-by-step as they prepared to take possession of the land which the Lord had promised. The next step would involve conflict.

Joshua trusted God. But he was a man, and men are susceptible to doubts, fears, concerns. The next order he would give would send men into battle. It was likely with this thought on his mind that he took a solitary stroll toward the great walls of Jericho. There he could think, pray, ponder what was to come.

He had no idea that he was about to have an encounter that would bolster his faith, strengthen his resolve, and cause any and all doubts about the future to evaporate. **We read about it in Joshua 5:13-15.**

Three things stand out in these verses.

1. The discovery of the stranger (13)

So, Joshua took a solitary stroll on the plains outside the outer walls of Jericho. With no warning he suddenly realized he was not alone. He encountered an unidentified stranger. Notice how he is described:

1) The description of the man.

Described as a man. No indication that there was anything divine or spiritual about this man.

Standing opposite of Joshua. The implication is that he is blocking Joshua's path. He did not come up beside Joshua to walk with him, but appeared in the path that Joshua was walking. Joshua would have to address this stranger and deal with him in some way. There was no bypassing or ignoring him.

He had drawn his sword. Quickly Joshua realized that this was not simply a man, he was a soldier and he was ready to do battle. He was locked and loaded. Joshua's instinctive reaction would not have been fear. He was a veteran soldier. He likely drew his own sword before speaking.

2) The movement of Joshua

Rather than freezing or retreating, the text simply tells us Joshua moved toward this stranger. He would not send his men into a battle that he was not willing to be personally involved in. He courageously stepped toward this threatening warrior.

3) The question of Joshua

Joshua asked the most important question for that moment. **Are you for us for our enemies?** Who are you fighting for? Which side are you on? Where are your allegiances. *If you are for us, why are you out here with sword drawn. If you are for them, prepare to fight.*

Joshua understood that in the battles to come, there would be no middle ground. You were either for Israel and its God, or you were an adversary. Rahab had chosen to cast her lot with God and His people. To this point this stranger had made no claim. Notice the . . .

2. The identity of the stranger (14)

His answer shocked Joshua. He was surprised by the answer offered. Yet he seemed to instantly know what to do with the information. Note the response of this unidentified warrior.

No. The question was *are you for us or for them?* In response the stranger refused to answer the question. **No!** What does that mean. The question was clear. Whose side are you on. In responding as he did this stranger was pointing out that Joshua had asked the wrong question. Joshua would soon learn why?

I come now as captain of the host of the Lord. I didn't come to take sides I came take over. Or to put it another way he was saying to Joshua, ***I didn't come to join your side, I came that you might join my side.*** So, just who was this strange warrior who came to meet Joshua on the plains of Jericho? If you search the commentaries you will find three primary theories.

1) Just a man chosen of God to deliver a message.

Serving God just like the prophets or judges.

2) An angel sent from God.

There were other times in the Bible when angels appeared in human forms to people. And at times they appeared as soldiers. An angel could certainly take down the city of Jericho and destroy its army. Walls and weapons would be no match for a powerful spirit being.

3. A preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

This is the second person of the Godhead, taking the form of a man in order to deliver a message to one of God's servants. He has

come personally to lead the people of God into the promised land. He has come to fight for His people and to insure their victory.

There are two words which you need to know.

Theophany. Visible appearance of God in the Old Testament.

Burning bush. The fire on Sinai. Whirlwind. Cloud and fire that led them when they came out of Egypt. Smoke that filled the temple.

Christophany. Special kind of theophany that specifically involves Jesus in human form prior to His incarnation.

Same one who met with Abraham under the oak tree.

Same one who wrestled with Jacob.

Same one who entered the furnace in Babylon to deliver the men.

I lean toward this being a Christophany. Primarily based on Joshua's response.

3. The reaction to the stranger (14-15)

Joshua's reaction is quick and decisive. He did three things. All point to this being more than a man and more than an angel.

1) Bowed down in submission.

The stranger made it clear that he was the ***captain of the host of the Lord***. It was a bold statement that Joshua was not ultimately in charge, He was. And Joshua acknowledges this by bowing in submission to this captain. He was yielding to a superior officer.

It wasn't a simple salute. It wasn't a tip of the hat. He bowed all the way to the ground in an act of submission and even worship. It was a complete surrender to the Lord.

When the Lord takes the field, this is the proper reaction. We bow down, we surrender, we worship. We yield to His authority, to His plans, to His will. Jericho would not be defeated by the military strategies of Joshua. It would be defeated by the presence of God.

2) Requested instructions.

Upon yielding to a new commander, Joshua essentially asked, ***what are your orders?*** Notice the two pronouns, ***my Lord, his servant***. The Lord had a personal relationship with Joshua and Joshua had a personal relationship with the Lord. They belonged to each other. However, be careful to note that one is ***Lord*** and the other is ***servant***. Joshua understood his place, his role, his position.

3) Removed his sandals.

Note the instructions. *Take off your sandals for the ground you are standing on is holy ground.* Joshua would have immediately remembered the testimony of Moses when he met God at the burning bush. This is the same God and His presence does the same things. Where He is, the ground is holy. He sanctifies the ground with His presence.

This worship center is not holy because of the structure. But when it is filled with God's presence it is holy. Not the building or the place, but the presence. Under a tree on an African plain, in a prison cell, in a hidden cave.

Significance of the removal of the sandals.

- a. Maybe those sandals represented their wandering in the wilderness. It was time to take them off and start fresh. I don't think so.
- b. Sandals defiled because they are in contact with a dirty ground, representing a sinful and dirty world. Must be put aside. Maybe
- c. Sandals represented sin which separates us from God, just like the soles of shoes separate us from the ground. Joshua, if you want to have unhindered fellowship with a holy God, remove that which separates you from holiness and thus from God. Likely

That was exactly what Joshua needed. Reminder that God was in charge and would be actively involved in every battle. He was not like a general making decisions thousands of miles away. He would take up sword and spear and would be side-by-side with the Hebrew warriors.

When he walked back to Gilgal he would be ready. His faith had been supercharged, his doubts or concerns had been buried and his confidence soared. I doubt he slept that night, but not out of fear but out of joy and wonder.

This puts everything in proper perspective. God is sovereign, and it's never a question of whether God is on our side, but whether **we are on God's side.**

What Joshua experienced alone on the plain of Jericho can be true for us as well. No matter what we're facing, no matter how complicated or difficult the problem in our life is, it just provides **more opportunity for God to demonstrate his power.** He is King Jesus, the Captain, the Commander-in-Chief. He is the one who gives us orders, asks us to listen and take him seriously, and then he gives us his strength to live one day at a time.

Takeaways:

1. *Encounters with God are strategic.*

The Lord met with Joshua at a critical time and for a reason. This was not some random spot-check. The Lord came when Joshua most need Him. When you sense a clear encounter with God, take it seriously. Don't negate it. Expect God to use it. **Can happen during a worship service, during private devotions, during a sleepless night, on a solitary road trip, or while simply pondering the future.**

2. *Our perspective on God must be selfless.*

Note that Joshua wanted to know if the Lord was with him or with his enemies. To be fair, at that time, he did not know it was the Lord. But the Lord's answer was important. He did not come to take sides but to

take over. At that point the question was ***Joshua, whose side are you on?*** It would be up to Joshua to yield.

3. *Our response to God is sequential.*

I'm not sure I've ever used the word *sequential* in a takeaway to a sermon. But here it is. The order of Joshua's response is important.

He humbly bowed before the Lord.

He sought the Lord's will.

He determined to walk in holiness before the Lord.

Then he was ready for warfare.

Warren Wiersbe right points out the order of Joshua's response to the Lord is significant and is a pattern for us. This is especially true when we are facing a challenge.

- 1) Humble worship
- 2) Holy walk
- 3) Heavenly warfare