

Battles the Lord Will Fight – Joshua 5:13-6:5

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I. INTRODUCTION

I want to begin today by telling you the story of a young man who in the 11th grade of high school surrendered his life to the Lord's purposes and expressed a desire for the Lord's will and plan in his life...fully believing that whatever the Lord had planned would be so much better than anything he could come up with. This young man's surrendering to the Lord was written down, signed and witnessed by his pastor. It was a moment he would never forget and that he would look back on often in his life as a life-changing moment that had a profound effect on everything in his life from there. You might call it a mountaintop moment for him and he looked forward with expectation to what God was going to accomplish in the years to come.

But as time went on, life happened. Lots of other dreams and hopes and desires for what the world has to offer crept in and often sidelined that full desire for God's will and God's plan. This young man was still in relationship with the Lord...still studying his Word, going to church, praying, even going to Bible School, in fact; and throughout the years God continued to show his love and reveal himself more and more. But along the road of this young man's life lots of rabbit trails looked really interesting and full of adventure and led him to spend lots of time and effort going down paths that eventually led to dead ends. He also listened to and believed lies that told him God couldn't use him and that he didn't have what it takes to do what God was calling him to do.

But fortunately for this young man, God was patient and faithful and didn't give up on him and over the years continued to change him little by little, realign his priorities and prepare him for that day when he would finally be ready to again fully desire God's will and plan no matter where it took him. You see God is always true to who he is as revealed in his Word: ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"*** (Lamentations 3:22-23). Have you experienced this to be true in your own life?

Well this young man, who along the way started becoming not so young, quite often got focused on desires for things that weren't bad in themselves, but weren't really what God had in mind for him. And when he would get focused on full pursuit of achieving one of these goals, he would often ask God to bless his efforts and help him fight the battles so he could finally get there. You see, he made the mistake many people do of pursuing his own goals and dreams and then asking God to bless his efforts and fight the battles needed to achieve them. In other words, he chose his own battles and then asked God to fight them for him, rather than remembering that the Lord only fights battles that are in line with his purposes and will bring about our good and his glory.

This was a truth that took many years for this young and eventually middle-aged man to learn, and it's the same truth we'll see revealed for us in our study of Scripture today. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Joshua chapter 5. Today, we'll be covering chapter 5, verses 13 through 15 and chapter 6, verses 1 through 5. We're picking up our journey with the Israelites into the Promised Land, just after all the boys and men had been circumcised at Gilgal, had healed for 3 days, and then had observed Passover with their families. The Israelites were back in full obedience to the terms of God's covenant and were now ready for conquest.

II. THE ARRIVAL OF THE CAPTAIN (Ch. 5, vs. 13 to 15)

So let's see what happens next as we read verses 13 through 15 of Joshua chapter 5:

13 Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" 14 He said, "No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" 15 The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Isn't our God surprising? You just never know what might happen next, especially when you're walking in step with his purposes. He's endlessly creative in the ways he reveals himself to us, showing us who he is and how fully engaged he is with our lives. Joshua, standing near Jericho and probably wondering what God's plan was for getting through those towering walls, looks up to see a mighty warrior facing him with a drawn sword. That would be startling, wouldn't it? To Joshua, he looked like a man ready for battle, and his first thought was: Is he here to fight for us or against us. And with that burning question in his mind, he approached the warrior and asked: "Are you for us or for our adversaries?"

But this mighty warrior had an interesting response to that simple question from Joshua. He said, "No." OK? Joshua probably thought there were only 2 answers to that question: either you're for us or you're against us. But the warrior surprised Joshua with a 3rd option: I'm not for you and I'm not for your adversaries; instead, I'm for the Lord and his purposes. He said, "**No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.**" Joshua was reminded by the Captain of that very important truth we all need to remember; a truth that will save us a lot of wasted time and effort and frustration in life. That truth is this: *the Lord is powerful, and mighty and fully engaged in this world and is committed to working in extraordinary ways through his people. But he is not here to fight for us or for our glory or for our selfish purposes. Rather, he is here with a drawn sword to fight for his purposes and for his glory and on behalf of those who will seek him, listen to him and get in step with his priorities and mission!* This is the same truth that was being learned by the young man I just told you about, and it's one all us need to allow to sink in to the deepest levels of our being.

The warrior also revealed an astounding truth about who he is that caused a pretty dramatic response within Joshua. Joshua found out that this warrior was not just a human being who had come to fight alongside the Israelites. This warrior was the Captain, the One in charge and giving orders, of none other than the Lord's angelic armies. No wonder Joshua instantly fell on his face and bowed down to the ground! As you probably know, angels are commonly referred to in Scripture as "the host of heaven" or "the heavenly host." In Luke chapter 2, the angels singing to the shepherds about Jesus' birth were described as "a multitude of the heavenly host."

The prophet Micaiah, in 1 Kings 22, verses 19 to 23, also described angels as “the host of heaven,” saying: **“Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and His left.”**

So Joshua found himself face to face with the Captain of all the Lord’s mighty angels and his sword was drawn! That would strike fear into your heart, wouldn’t it? Well, Joshua knew the only appropriate way to respond to this Captain was to hit the ground. The ESV translation says, **“Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped.”** In doing so, Joshua expressed honor, glory, humility and submission to One who was so much greater than he. And he expressed to this Captain that he was his servant and willing to listen to and receive whatever he had to say.

So was this Captain himself an angel? Was this perhaps Gabriel? Well, I think we can conclusively say, “No,” from what we find here in the passage and in the rest of Scripture. First of all, angels are never to be worshiped, and this Captain didn’t stop Joshua from worshiping him. You may remember that the apostle John once had an encounter with an angel, recorded for us in Revelation chapters 17 through 19, and listen to what happened when John tried to worship the angel:

9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." 10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Angels are fellow servants of God. They are powerful servants, but nonetheless servants of God and never to be worshiped. This angel in Revelation would not let John worship him, because God alone deserves our worship and he does not give his glory to another (Isaiah 42:8). This is in fact why the angel, Lucifer, whom we now call Satan, was cast out of heaven down to earth: because he wanted to be worshiped like God; he wanted to make himself equal with God. An angel who is serving God will never allow himself to be worshipped.

The second reason we can conclusively say that this Captain of the angelic armies is not an angel, is found in how the Captain responds to Joshua’s question: **“What**

has my lord to say to his servant?" The Captain responds by saying: ***"Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy."*** If you'll remember, there's only one other place in Scripture where someone is told to remove their sandals because they're standing on holy ground, and that was when Moses encountered God Himself in the burning bush. The presence of God himself makes a place holy and taking off sandals or shoes is an appropriate response. History tells us that it was a common cultural practice at this time to remove sandals when entering temples to avoid bringing in dust or any other kind of impurity (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary – Old Testament*, pg. 79). So this statement from the Captain must have further opened Joshua's eyes to the reality of who he was speaking to, as he surely connected that statement about holy ground with what Moses had shared with him about his own encounter with God himself in the burning bush.

And the third and final argument why this Captain of the Lord's host is not an angel, is found in Daniel chapter 8, verses 9 through 11. In these verses Daniel is speaking prophetic words about the end times and he mentions someone called the Commander of the host and he gives us a clear picture the identity of this Commander. Beginning in verse 9, Daniel says:

9 Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. 10 It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. 11 It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down.

Clearly the Commander of the host in this passage is God himself, and I would further argue is Jesus Christ.

The evidence from Scripture seems to point clearly to an understanding that this appearance to Joshua of the Captain of the Lord's host is what we would call a Christophany...an appearance in the Old Testament of Jesus Christ himself...the Living Word who was in the beginning with God and is God and through whom God the Father created the world (John 1:1-3). And isn't it interesting that Joshua, who is recognized as a clear type of Christ (or a person whose life pointed

to Christ and told us something about his future work)...that this Joshua encounters face to face the very One to whom his whole life pointed...the One who would even share his name (Yeshua)!

God never ceases to surprise us and blow our minds when we have eyes to see and understand the great unified story he's written in Scripture! And as Joshua, a godly man embracing God's purposes and will for his life, hears the instructions of the Captain and considers the reality of who he's talking to, he quickly responds in obedience, removing his sandals, worshiping and listening for God's next words of instruction.

III. THE REVEALING OF THE BATTLE PLAN (Ch. 6, vs. 1 to 5)

Well, let's read verses 1 through 5 of chapter 6 now and see what the Lord tells him to do next:

1 Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. 2 The Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. 3 "You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. 4 "Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 "It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead."

Now it's NOT conclusive from the text whether or not this communication from the Lord is a continuation of Joshua's encounter with the Captain of the Lord's hosts, or whether this is something that happened after the Captain departed. We know from our study of Joshua so far that the Lord has been speaking to Joshua over and over again in previous chapters apart from any appearance of the Captain, so it could be either or. Personally, I tend to think this was a continuation of Joshua's encounter with the Captain, and as Joshua realized that he was talking to the Lord because of the "holy ground" statement, the text then starts referring to him as "the Lord." But I wouldn't stake my life on it, and in

either case, we know the battle plan Joshua is now receiving is coming directly from the Lord himself.

So in verse 1, we're first given the important piece of information that Jericho was tightly shut...no one was allowed to go in or out, PERIOD. And as the Lord began speaking he called Joshua's attention to this fact, pointing out that it showed that the king and the people of Jericho were in terrible fear of the Israelites.

Otherwise they would have come out confidently to face them in battle rather than going into lock-down, defensive mode. And the Lord put this forth to Joshua as more evidence that He had given Jericho into Joshua's hand and that victory was certain. He said: ***"See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and its valiant warriors."***

Then, in verses 3 through 5, The Lord reveals the unexpected and strange battle plan, which would go something like this: All the men of war, with the priests and the ark in the middle, were to march around the city once a day for six days.

Other than the priests carrying the ark, there were to be 7 additional priests, each carrying a trumpet, who would go in front of the ark blowing their trumpets as they circled the city. Then on the 7th day, they were to repeat this whole procedure 7 times; and after finishing the final circle, the priests were to blow a long blast on their trumpets, at which point all the people were to SHOUT a great shout.

That was God's simple plan for victory and it included none of the typical procedures involved in any other human battle plan in recorded history before or since! This unique plan would take some time, effort, patience, humility, and a lot of trust that God was going to come through in the end. But God's promise was that if they would follow these strange, but simple instructions, there would be no need for ramparts, or a 3-year siege of the city, or creative planning about how to get through those walls. Instead the walls would simply crumble and fall down flat when the people shouted at the end of the final circling on the 7th day. Every man would be able to simply climb up straight ahead over the rubble and take the city. The promised rewards were incredible, but great humility, trust and obedience would be needed. God's specific instructions would need to be followed exactly for victory.

And what about the 7 trumpets? Did you wonder, why 7? Or why trumpets at all? Well, trumpets were commonly used in battles, but usually to signal a charge or rally the troops or direct them to do something. But can you think of anywhere else in Scripture where the specific number of 7 trumpets are used? Revelation is the place, isn't it? In Revelation chapter 8, verses 1 through 6, we find the only other reference to 7 trumpets in Scripture; and these trumpets in Revelation are the trumpets that release God's terrible judgment and wrath upon the earth and upon all those who have rejected God's offer of salvation and forgiveness through our Captain and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Revelation chapter 8, we read this about the 7 trumpets of God's judgment that are still to be blown in the future:

1 When the Lamb [who is Jesus, the Commander of the Lord's hosts] broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

These 7 trumpets will usher in the terrible day of the Lord's final wrath and judgment against all those who have rejected their Creator and refused to take refuge in Jesus Christ, through repentance and faith in him. You can read sometime in Revelation about each of the 7 trumpets and the specific judgments they unleash in the last days. Trust me, you won't to experience any of them and the only certain way to be saved from them is by being in Christ.

Like the 7 trumpets in Revelation, the 7 trumpets being used in the conquest of Jericho also announce the Lord's judgment against the inhabitants of the city of Jericho as they continued to ignore the obvious evidence of God's existence and chose to resist and fight against the one true God rather than surrendering

themselves to him. The day of the Lord's wrath was arriving for the people of Jericho and was being announced by these 7 trumpets. Had they followed the example of Rahab, who expressed her belief in the one true God, called out for his mercy and aligned herself with him, they could have escaped this day of his wrath as she soon would. But on the 7th day, when the priests would sound their final, long trumpet blast, it would be too late and all that would remain would be wrath and judgment for everyone else in the city. God was even gracious enough to give them 7 more days to think about it. But at the end of the 7 days, it would be too late.

In the same way, God is right now waiting patiently and desiring that all people accept his simple plan of salvation and forgiveness through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. As Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3, verses 8 through 10:

8...do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

My friends, the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, but desires for all people to come to repentance. Don't believe me? Listen to God's rhetorical question in Ezekiel 18, verse 23:

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord God, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"

The obvious answer is, "No." God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires instead that they would turn from their wicked ways and live life and eternity with him! Yet we must always remember that there will be a day when it's too late to accept his salvation through Christ. When we die it's too late, and when that final day of the Lord's wrath comes it will be too late for everyone that's not in Christ. Don't ever put it off and end up missing out on the mercy and grace and forgiveness God offers all who will be restored to relationship and peace with their Creator God through repentance and faith in Christ!

Well, the day of the Lord was about to arrive for the people of Jericho, but the Lord was giving them 7 more days to come to repentance and surrender to the one true God. God would be victorious either way, but the outcome would have been so much different for the people of Jericho had they heeded his 7 day warning and followed Rahab's example. And for God's people who would follow his battle plan in faith and obedience, he promised to miraculously remove in a moment the obstacle, the wall, that kept them from beginning their conquest of the Promised Land and entering his beautiful rest! We'll watch that unfold in our next message on Joshua.

IV. SUMMARY, APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So as we wrap up today's message, I would sum up the key points of this section of Scripture with this statement: *The Lord Himself is fully engaged with the battles we're fighting for his purposes and he and his angelic armies are ready to one day execute judgment on those who continue to reject Him, but to work powerfully right now through those who will fear and honor him, get in step with his purposes, and show their trust in Him by following his instructions.*

And the question we all need to ask ourselves today, is this: Are the battles I'm fighting right now, the things I'm chasing after and devoting most of my time and energies to...are these battles the Lord's battles or my own? If they're the Lord's battles...battles he's called us to fight that are lined up with his priorities and his purposes...we can know that our Captain is there with drawn sword fighting to give us the victory and to accomplish great and powerful things through us for his glory. Do you believe that today? I can tell you its true! But if the battles I'm fighting are just for worldly things that will make me comfortable or bring me glory or build up my ego or really just amount to the pursuit of God-substitutes to find satisfaction and fulfillment in life, then I shouldn't be surprised if I lose those battles or if I win them and then find out they don't deliver what was promised and actually wasted lots of time, energy and money, and perhaps even years of my life.

The young man whose story I told you earlier had a powerful moment of surrender to the Lord and desiring of his will. But then he had a long road of flirting with what the world has to offer; of heading down rabbit trails; of fighting battles the Lord didn't call him to fight; and of pursuing the Lord at about 60%.

But do you know what happened over the years? His faithful God was patient and loving and was continuously using his Word and life circumstances to bring him back to that place where he would once more fully desire God's plan and calling for his life. And as you've probably already guessed, that young man was me. As many of you know, at age 40, through some challenging experiences, God brought me full circle back to a point where I once again completely desired his will and his plan whatever it was and no matter what it might cost me. And in that return to surrender and full pursuit, God did and continues to do some amazing things within me and through me that I never would have thought possible. The fact that I'm up here preaching God's Word to you today is just one of his many miracles!

Does this mean I've arrived and I never get sidetracked anymore with battles God doesn't call me to fight or that I never go astray from 100% full pursuit of God and his will? Absolutely not. I'm still tempted by rabbit trails and can easily be distracted by other things. I'm still a work in progress and will be until the day I die. But I share this story with you today, in the hopes that it will encourage each of you to assess where you're at in your desiring of God's plan and purposes in your life...that it will encourage you to make sure you're in step with where God wants to take you and that you're fighting the battles he's ready to fight with you. Are you still holding him at arms-length, keeping one foot in the world and one foot in his kingdom? Are you still trying to sit on the throne of your life and take the lead? Are you fighting battles without God for things that aren't important to him? Or are you ready today for the adventure and conquest and rest that awaits when you decide you want him above all, no matter what it costs? He's worth it and he'll never disappoint, I promise.

And for any of you out there who are still like the people in the city of Jericho...knowing God is real and on your doorstep, but about to experience his wrath and judgment because you're still not joined up with him through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ...I want to invite you to make that decision today. Get out from under God's wrath and judgment, listen to the trumpet warning, and accept his path to freedom and forgiveness by just having a simple conversation with him where you repent of your sin and rebellion against him, express that you believe Jesus died on the cross for you sin and rose from the dead, and invite Jesus to be your Savior and Ruler of your life from here on out. That's God's simple path for you and all people to escape the walls of Jericho and

get on God's side. Below is a simple prayer that you can quietly pray to God if you're ready. What a great day this could be for you if you pray it and mean it in your heart!

A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead...
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...
Amen.