

III. Advent in Biblical Perspective
From Christophanies to Epiphanies
“Christophany #2—The Captain of the Lord’s Host”
Joshua 5:13–15
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December 13, 2015 – Morning sermon

Let’s look in God’s Word in Joshua 5 as it concludes in verses 13, 14 and 15. This is the Word of God. It’s the Truth. Joshua 5:13–15 says [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. This grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached to you.

I have two questions for you. One is do you know who Phillip Bengtson is? Two, do you know who Vince Lombardi is? Vince Lombardi was the famous football coach for the Green Bay Packers and after he retired the man that followed him was Phil Bengtson and that may be why most don’t know who Phillip was. So how would you like to be Joshua and follow Moses? Moses is the one who ushers in the ten plagues against Egypt with the staff of the Lord. Moses delivered God’s people from 400 years of slavery into freedom. Moses guided God’s people for 40 years through the wilderness to rocks that gave forth water to them and manna that God sent down from heaven each day in order to care for them, and twice as much on the day before the Sabbath. Moses would see the Promised Land but not be allowed to enter it. Moses was the one with whom God made His covenant and gave him a second covenant sign to be joined to the sign He gave to Abraham. The second sign was the Passover that was instituted there as the Lord delivered them from the tenth plague with the death of the first born. Yet God’s people were delivered because of the Lamb that would be slain for them. That is who Joshua had to follow.

So let me tell you where we are with Joshua right now. You have crossed over the Jordan River at a place known as Gilgal. It is about a half a mile beyond the Jordan and about a half a mile to a mile from Jericho. It is here where God’s people are about to go to this land that is occupied by six fierce Canaanite nations, all of them bigger than them, with warfare equipment they have no access to for God’s people are basically a band of nomads coming out of the desert. Jericho is the first city they come upon that covers seven square acres. Archeologists say this city is surrounded by a wall that was up to ninety feet high in some places and thirty feet thick. This is your first task before you, to conquer this city. You are Joshua.

I can kind of identify with Joshua. I remember when the Lord had convinced me that He had called me to Briarwood in 1999. I went to the General Assembly that year and had men coming up to me saying “Pastor Reeder, I understand you’re going to Briarwood, following Frank Barker.” I said “Right.” The next question usually was ‘Did you really pray about this?’ I can kind of identify with Phil Bengtson and Joshua. When one guy asked me if I was sure about my move I said “Here is the way I look at it. I count Frank Barker as one of the greatest pastors the Lord has given to His church. I learned so much from him. His son runs the sound

for Briarwood. He has a son in law, on staff who is planting a church and two daughters that fill in, in various ministries at the church and in leadership. He has another son in law that is an elder.” Someone told me only a fool would do this. I said ‘ok I’m qualified.’

You can just about see this in Joshua. It is the evening of the battle and he is out doing some reconnaissance and reflection. There he sees something that is life transforming, life altering and life changing. Before I get into the study, let me just recap where we are in our Advent season series. The Advent season is designed to celebrate the first coming of Christ in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. The Advent season in the Bible is called the epiphany which is the appearance or outshining of the glory of God for the grace of God has appeared – epiphaneia in Greek. But that epiphany of Christ’s coming as the Promised One to accomplish the promises of God in whom all of the promises of God are yes and amen, is anticipated in the Old Testament. It is prophesied with multiple prophecies. It is anticipated with types, symbols and shadows.

It is also anticipated with theophanies which are pre-incarnate appearances of God which is the second Person of the Trinity. So these Old Testament theophanies we also called Christophanies – Christ appearing. It is only momentary and not an incarnate body He is about to receive when He comes into this world born of the virgin. It is a temporary miraculous appearance in which His manifestation and His message come together to tell us something about the epiphany that is coming. The Christophanies are anticipating the epiphanies and the appearance and message are telling you something about it. There are multiple theophanies in the Old Testament but we only have the opportunity to look at a few of them.

We have already looked at one of them and that was the angel of the Lord from the burning bush speaking to Moses in the last study. Let me remind you what the epiphanies or Christophanies are all about. We call it the Incarnation in the Advent season. These epiphanies were telling us the Messiah was coming who would fulfill all the promises which fall into two categories. One is that He would save His people from their sins and defeat their enemies and two, He will receive His people unto Himself into a glorious existence with Him forever to dwell among them. What we don’t see in the Old Testament is that the two promises will be fulfilled by two Advents. In the Old Testament it looks like one Advent with two promises.

In the New Testament you find out that it is two promises but it is also two Advents. The first Advent is when He is born in Bethlehem, lives His perfect life for 33 years, provides for us a perfect righteousness and goes to the cross to deliver us from our sins and defeat our enemies. Then He ascends in that incarnate body and then He is coming again in that incarnate body for a second Advent to fulfill the second promise in which He destroys the enemies He has defeated and receives the people He has saved unto Himself and will be with them in a new heavens and a new earth forever and ever.

So, the Incarnation/Epiphany is a work of God’s grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins and will come again for us to be with us forever. This is called subtraction by addition. He took upon Himself humanity and humbled Himself to become obedient unto death, even death on a cross. By a man comes sin and by a Man comes the salvation of sinners. In that same incarnate body, now transformed and glorified He will come again to receive us, whom He has saved, to be with Him forever. That is the celebration of Christmas, the epiphany.

What are some of the Christophanies? In the last study we looked at the angel of the Lord (the Second Person of the Trinity) in the burning bush (that wasn’t burning). What did we learn from that? The Son of God who called Moses to deliver His people from the bondage of

slavery (in Egypt) and the tyranny of Pharaoh to dwell in the Land of Promise, has now come Himself to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, to dwell with them in the new heavens and the new earth forever.

Now we come to a second Christophany in our series that is pointing to the epiphany of Christ. This one is in Joshua 5. Most of the time the theophanies or Christophanies in the Old Testament are in an appearance where Christ is speaking from the glory cloud – the cloud of the Shekinah glory, the pillar of fire and cloud that would descend upon the tent of meeting. Sometimes it would be the appearance of the angel of the Lord, like at the oaks of Mamre with Abraham. Sometimes it's actually both together – the glory cloud and the angel of the Lord speaks from the glory cloud. Two times (Joshua 5 and Daniel 8) the Christophany in the Old Testament is called the Captain/Commander of the Lord of Hosts.

So what is it that this is telling us about the coming of Christ? First of all we need to do a little back story here. Let's look at Genesis 15. God's covenant of grace unfolds through a series of covenants in the Bible. One of the first covenants is a covenant with Abraham. If you want to do a study on this on your own you would go to three key passages of Scripture – Genesis 12, 15 and 17. In Genesis 15 the sacrifice is made and God Himself walks through the sacrifice showing us that this is a covenant of grace for God will save us. That description is found in Genesis 15:1–11 but I want you to see what happens when God makes this covenant with Abraham that He'll give him a seed, a nation is to come through which will come the seed of the Redeemer who will bring a blessing of bringing men and women salvation from all the nations. That has been the promise to Abraham. After this covenant has been portrayed and established with him this is what happens next.

Genesis 15:12–21 says *[12] As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. [13] Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land (Egypt) that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. [14] But I will bring judgment (ten plagues) on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. [15] As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. [16] And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

[17] When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. [18] On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, [19] the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, [20] the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, [21] the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

In other words, God is putting him down there to get him ready and when the fullness of their iniquity is there God will bring him up to do two things – to deliver them from bondage and give them their land and secondly God will use them to bring judgment upon His and their enemies. That is the promise God makes to Abraham. That is the back story but the back story is not through there. Four hundred years later He calls Moses, puts him in front of a burning bush and through Moses God will deliver His people. God told Moses to tell them "I Am that I Am has sent you." Then through Moses, God brought great judgment upon the Egyptians through the ten plagues. They will not only let you go but they will put possessions in you. So He reaffirms in the covenant with Moses (sign of the Passover) what He promised with the covenant with Abraham (sign of circumcision) and unites the two together. They not only have

the people circumcised as they leave Egypt but they institute a second covenant sign and it's the Passover. So that is the back story.

Now fast forward 400 years from Abraham to Moses and fast forward 40 years from Moses to Joshua. You have crossed out of the wilderness to the land of Promise. The wilderness is behind you and the land of the Promise is before you. The nations that will be dispossessed through God bringing judgment upon them through you, their iniquity has now come to fruition. The first city is Jericho. It is fortified and one of the oldest cities in all humanity. These warrior nations are all bigger than yours are there. Here Joshua is being encouraged as the Lord identifies him with Moses and affirms him. God will be with him and that's his hope. He does this to Joshua through another Christophany. This is life changing for him.

So here is the story. In Joshua 1 through 4, Joshua has led the people over and the Jordan River has parted and dried up. The Ark of the Covenant has been brought across and the people have come across on dry land. Does this sound familiar? It is like how the people went across under Moses from the Red Sea. Here it was with Joshua across the Jordan River. The manna that was given to them in the wilderness has now ceased. There is no turning back. Now they are in a land with milk and honey. At Gilgal they circumcise the nation of Israel for the second time. The first time was when they left Egypt. Now they are setting aside the reproach of Egypt and reaffirming the Abrahamic covenant. Then they observe the Passover for the second time. They identify not only with Abraham but with Moses and God affirms them as His people. He has them in the land of Promise and they are ready to move forward. In this first city of Jericho God tells them not to take anything from it for it's the tithe. Take the city and give it to Me. When you finish Jericho go straight up into the middle of the land. You stand between two mountains and praise the Lord who takes your cursing and gives you His blessing. That is the story surrounding our text for this study.

Now what about the real story that occurs right now? Have you ever had an algebra test? I think I invented acid reflux on the night before an algebra test. This is real life. Can imagine what Joshua was thinking with Jericho right before him? He is an untried general with an untried army made up of a bunch of nomads. They have these homemade weapons. He is out on the eve of the battle. You can feel Joshua's anxiety, his reflection and maybe even a little reconnaissance about the battle in front of him. He encounters a warrior with a sword already drawn, ready for battle. Understandable when Joshua encounters him, he does some interrogation with a question and perhaps he is also doing some recruitment here.

Joshua 5:13, 14a says [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?" [14a] And he said, "No... I'm sure Joshua thought 'No, what?' No, you're not on our side? No, you're not on their side? Joshua 5:14 says [14a] And he said, "No; but **I am** the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come."* Notice how it says 'I have come.' I Am has come to him. Here is the I Am that I Am and here is the commander's first order. It goes on in verse 14 to say, *And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"*

Joshua responds to His command with worship, submission and then surrender. Now Joshua wants to know his orders from the Lord. Joshua affirms deity. When we see 'I Am' which is mentioned twice that also affirms Christ's deity. The commander proceeds with Joshua's orders in Joshua 5:15 which says [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.*

Joshua obeys the first order. The Lord is present and that means wherever the Lord is present is holy ground. Do you see how this is a gift from God to encourage Joshua? There was the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan. Manna was given and manna ceased. The wilderness is behind you and all the fulfillment of the land of Promise is in front of you. The Lord has called Moses and the Lord has called Joshua. I Am has come to Moses and I Am has come to Joshua. He told Moses to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground and He does the same with Joshua. Joshua like Moses submits, surrenders and worships.

Here is the takeaway. How does this Christophany bring us to the epiphany of Christ? The Captain of the Lord's Host who came to Joshua ready for battle, is the Son of God who came to Bethlehem ready for war and has won the victory. The One that came to Bethlehem came with drawn sword. The sword of the Word drawn by the Lord Himself, has come ready for war and has engaged the enemy. He has saved His enemies and made them His people. He positions His judgment against all who reject Him and has defeated Satan, death, the grave and hell itself. He has won the victory. With Christ the Divine Warrior in the manger you win the victory and we are more than conquerors through Him who came to love us and set us free.

In other words, this Christophany is telling you that still in that manger is the King of Kings. I understand the humility of Christ. He didn't come to provide sentimental stories to do during a Christmas season for He came as the Divine Warrior to rescue and redeem us from sin's penalty and power. He came as a sovereign King to do battle, humbling Himself that He would be in a position among us and to be one of us. He is no mercenary warrior that you hire on for your agenda in life. He is no partisan commander or tribal god that you and I hire to be on our side. The reason Jesus says No to Joshua when he asks Him what side He is on is because Joshua was asking the wrong question. The question is not whether Christ is on our side. The question is, are you on His side?

A number of years ago George Bush the first led this nation in a war in Kuwait to set a small little nation free. Before he gave the command for the assault to begin he called in Billy Graham. At that time Billy was probably the closest thing we have had in this nation to a national pastor. Billy went into the White House to pray with George Bush. When Billy left George Bush went to the microphone and he was asked the question "Saddam Hussein has said this is a holy war and Allah god is on their side and will destroy us. You have just prayed with Billy Graham so I guess you think that God is on our side and not on their side. Mr. President, on whose side is the Lord?" George Bush had done his homework.

There was another president during the Civil War with Christians on both sides of the trenches and he was asked the question "Who's side is the Lord on?" Abraham Lincoln having spent time with his pastor, Dr. Phineas Gurley from New York Avenue Presbyterian church, said, "That is the wrong question for any of us. The question for us is, not is the Lord on our side, but are we on the Lord's side?" So that is the question I would put to you that Joshua answered with worship, surrender and submission.

I am on Your side, the King of Kings, the Divine Warrior. If you are on the Lord's side it will be clear for you will no longer see yourself as in charge or the commander. At most you are second in command. Elders and pastors can never lead a church unless they understand they are never in command for the Lord is the Commander of the Lord of hosts. Our job is not to incorporate Him for our agendas but to serve Him. You are never in command ultimately. The Lord is in command no matter what position the Lord honors us with. If you're on His side you are also committed to His mission. It is not that we hire Him on for our mission in life. We have surrendered so we are here for His mission.

At Briarwood we put it this way. For God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. The Lord isn't here to make us a great church. We are here for a great God to be on His mission. You not only embrace His mission but His weapons, His armor, His strategy and everything that He has. Joshua, now that the Commander has shown up what is your strategy to take Jericho? I'm here to do the Commander's work and our strategy is for six days to march around the city and on the seventh day we're going to march around seven times. Then the priests will blow the trumpets and then all the people will raise a shout. Then God will knock the walls down and we're going to go in. Can you imagine explaining that strategy to Napoleon, Wellington, or George Washington?

Brothers and sisters, you're the same way. God has given us divinely fashioned weapons to tear down the strongholds of men and women to take every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ to rescue sinners from the pit of hell and the tomb of sin to the triumph of Christ. What are our weapons? One is preaching which is foolishness in the eyes of the world. Another is prayer. Have you heard the recent shaming of prayer? The world shames the Lord's strategies and weapons. They say personal evangelism is nothing more than bigotry. They don't understand small group disciple making. But we serve the Commander and the Commander says that it is through the foolishness of the message preached that men and women are being saved. The Commander has said that you have not because you ask not so we pray. The Commander has said to go and make disciples of all the nations. The Commander has said to seek and save the lost. So we are going to do the strategy and use the weapons that the Commander has given to us for we walk not by sight but by faith and know that the Lord is doing great things.

That recent shaming of prayer in that newspaper said God isn't fixing things and my response is that the reason God isn't fixing things is that God didn't come to fix things. God came at the cross with sword drawn to fix us, to make us right with God that we can know Him intimately, accurately, powerfully, personally and we can make Him known. And He is making all things new from the inside out. So if you are on the Lord's side you are never in command. It is the Lord's mission, strategy and weapons and if you're on the Lord's side you win.

I read the last chapter and I know we win but I knew we had won because I read right at the end of all the Gospels that we won at the cross and the empty tomb. There the Divine Warrior rose in triumph. We are just working out the victory, waiting for and longing for His soon coming to bring it to a consummation. If you are on the Lord's side then worship is everything and everywhere you go is holy ground. When His people assemble it's holy ground.

I go to evangelical churches and worship in their worship services, when they God's people gather who inhabits their praises? It is the Lord. Who dwells within you? The Lord is in His Temple. I can't see Him by sight but by faith I know He is here. That is why God's people have great joy in worship and it's always interdependent with reverence. Worship services are not show time. The Lord is here and that's why we don't get up and walk out on Him. That's why we don't get distracted because by faith our Savior is here. When His Word is sung and preached the Savior Himself is speaking to us. Whatever it means to take off sandals in the 21st century we are ready to do it. The Lord is in this place.

If you are on the Lord's side and I know we sing the song Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and that is right but also the Lord fought the battle of Jericho. I saw a thing of TV that did a test to see if trumpets could knock down thirty feet deep walls. It wasn't the trumpets that did it but the Lord. We go to the battle but it's not us, it is the Lord in us. The Lord fights the

battle in us, through us, and with us but the battle is the Lord's and all the glory goes to the Lord from His people. That is what this Christophany is showing us.

I know we're about to hear again that there is a war on Christmas but there has always been a war on Christmas, but you have a bigger paradigm. There is a war on Christmas because Christmas was the Divine declaration of war. Christmas is war. The Divine Warrior came with sword in hand ready to rescue enemies and save them their sins, to bring forth judgment ultimately upon those who stand against Him and to defeat our enemies, not only our sin but death has no sting. The grave has been conquered and hell has been subdued for us because Jesus drank our hell on the cross that we could have eternal life. Christmas is war and it was won by the Divine Warrior in that manger who came with sword drawn.

I know the new Star Wars movie is right around the corner and I know some of you have had your tickets for months to see it. You have already planned the costume you are going to wear. I know it's fun, this mythical thought of men and women from the earth rising to do war in the heavens but this day I tell you history, the God of the heavens has come down to the earth to bring the war for your soul and has won the victory.

Who is on the Lord's side? Mary said 'Let it be done to your servant as You have declared.' Surrender. Joshua said 'what does my Lord say to his servant?' A prostitute named Rahab is in the city of Jericho with a scarlet thread and she will not only be numbered on the Lord's side but will be numbered in the line through which the Divine Warrior will come. Shepherds and wise men will be on the Lord's side. Will you be on the Lord's side? If so, He'll be in command. You will be on His mission, using His weapons and not only will gathered worship be gloriously joyful and reverent but life worship is serving the Divine Warrior. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word and thank You for all of its wonderful, glorious, truthful, dynamic statements. Father, I thank You that You're here by Your Spirit as Christ is exalted. Would You move upon our souls and our hearts? Because the Divine Warrior has won the victory, we are on His side and He has brought us from death unto life. If Christ be for us, then who can be against us? His presence is in us, among us and His power is at work through us that men and women might be won from sin's death sway to Christ's victory for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

The Incarnation/Epiphany is a work of God's grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and will come again for us to be with us forever.

Christophany #1

The Angel of the Lord—the Burning Bush

The Son of God, who called Moses to deliver His people from the bondage of slavery and the tyranny of Pharaoh to dwell in the Land of Promise, has now come Himself to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan to dwell with them in the New Heavens and the New Earth forever.

CHRISTOPHANY #2

The Captain of the Lord's Host

- The Back Story
- The Story
- The Real Story

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Captain of the Lord's Host who came to Joshua ready for battle, is the Son of God who came to us at Bethlehem ready for War and has won the Victory.