

VII. Crisis and the Christian in Biblical Perspective

“Joshua and the Jericho Crisis”

Joshua 5:13–15

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This is our last study in this series and we will be in the first book of the former prophets as it is called in the Old Testament. That is the book of Joshua and in this study we will be looking at another case study called the Jericho crisis. 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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Two things have guided us in this series. One is that we have looked at some case studies. We have looked at Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Joseph and Nehemiah in crisis. We looked at the two crisis Jesus was asked about in Luke 13. We have attempted to draw down lessons in light of those crises. I will not take time to review these but you can access the audio and transcript of them on our website, including this one.

A second thing is that we have approached this with a certain principled confidence. This confidence comes from James 1:2–5 which says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* When, not if, the crisis test comes we're to count it all joy because of something we know and that is what I have done during this series – to give you what you should know when a sovereign God providentially brings crisis to us, leads us into the crisis, and goes with us through the crisis, no matter what the crisis is.

As we get into this last study I first want to remind you of something. Whenever you do evangelism and discipleship there is a great instrument Jesus used so often and most of the time we seem to neglect it. That instrument is the use of a question. Questions are invaluable. My favorite question is to get with someone who is not a Christian and ask them if there is a heaven. My favorite location for that question is on an airplane and my favorite time to use it is after some turbulence. Then I'll follow up with another question – ‘how do you think you get there?’

Why are questions so important? It is because questions are revealing. Questions reveal what the person answering knows. So if you ask the right questions, in the right way to invite their participation they will begin to share things with you rather than speculate on what they know. Secondly, a question also reveals what the questioner knows and thinks through the question they ask. That is exactly what happens right outside of Jericho when Joshua asks a question.

Joshua means God is our salvation and it comes from the word Yeshua, Yahweh. Joshua in the Old Testament is followed by its New Testament counterpart which is Jesus. This Joshua

in Joshua 5 is the newly appointed leader of this burgeoning nation (Israel) that has been in the wilderness for 40 years, having been delivered and led out of Egypt all the way to the river Jordan by Moses. Moses has prepared Joshua to now be their leader and they are now in front of Jericho.

Do you know who Phillip Bengston is? Many probably don't know who he is but before I tell you who he is, do you know who followed Paul Bear Bryant, the football coach at the University of Alabama? In the professional range, arguably probably one of the greatest football coaches is Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers. What most people don't know is that Phillip Bengston was the next coach of the Packers after Lombardi. That's what usually happens when there is a legend and the next guy takes over. He usually doesn't last long and most don't even remember him. If you think it would be tough to follow Vince Lombardi, how would you like to follow Moses?

With the leading of the Lord Moses led the people through 10 plagues. He took one to two million people out of slavery. He parted the Red Sea. Provided manna and quail for the people in the wilderness. He did miracles – water from a rock. Ok now it's your turn Joshua. Then Joshua has these 12 tribes full of grumblers. They have crossed the Jordan River and now they are facing the first city which is Jericho.

Jericho is arguably the oldest walled city in civilization. It goes back to the 7th or 8th century. The walls are six and half feet thick surrounding about 8 acres and when it was first built it had about 200 people. Since then Jericho's walls have been heightened and thickened even more. Now we are in the 21st civilization to occupy Jericho since its inception. The reason the city is walled is because it has a lot of money and it's an oasis on the midst of the edge of a wilderness. It is a city filled with taxes because the two main crossroads of the world intersect at this city.

This city is mentioned often in the Bible. Herod the Great will build a palace in Jericho for his wife with beautiful swimming pools and from there he built a fortress on the mountain seen from Jericho named for his mother, Cyprus. Herod the Great is the one who tried to kill another Yeshua in Bethlehem, Jesus and after that he goes to Jericho which is where he dies. It's also a place where Elijah and Elisha will minister. There is where the fountain of Elisha is where the waters were made sweet. Rahab the harlot hides spies in this city and she and her household will be spared. Rahab will marry a man named Salmon and from their line will come King David. Even further in the genealogy, will come Jesus. Jericho is an interesting place to study. Joshua has to take this city.

When I played sports I would go to the stadium the night before and try to think through what was going to happen at the game. Now that I'm saved and I'm a pastor I'll come to the church on a Saturday night and just walk through the sanctuary and pray. It is the anticipation and that's where Joshua is right now in this text. With this nation of nomads Joshua is about to take on the most famous, oldest walled city in civilization and has been entrenched. They have heard about their victories in the wilderness so the city is getting prepared for them. Joshua is out anticipating the moment and all of a sudden he sees a warrior and he begins to contemplate. This warrior is equipped, ready, prepared and even has his sword drawn.

Joshua sees him and asks him a question. It's an either or question – Are you for us or for our adversaries? This warrior is a possible recruit with much promise, so Joshua waits for the answer to his question to get knowledge from the one being questioned. The one being questioned does not give an either or answer for his answer is 'no.' Joshua is probably thinking

‘No, you’re not for us or no you’re not for them?’ The warrior responds “*No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.*”

Who is this? Theologians have discussed this for a long time. Is this an angel? Angels do come and have ministries sent by God. Is this a man who has astonishing presence and has become a myth in the mind of Joshua, now inscribed in the Bible? Or is this what is known as a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ? I believe this is a Christophany, where Jesus appears as a man yet I didn’t say He has become a man for that will await the Incarnation. He appears as a man, a warrior in light of the incoming battle.

Joshua’s question to Him tells us something about Joshua’s perspective, his heart, his life and the Lord is about to use this question to give him an answer that will recalibrate Joshua’s heart and life. His answer is basically ‘no, I’m not a recruit and you haven’t come to Me, I’ve come to you, now I’ve come.’ Then He tells Joshua to take his sandals off because he is standing on holy ground.

Here is why I’m absolutely convinced this is a Christophany for four reasons. One is that He is calling and expecting Joshua to worship. How do I know this? Two, this is an echo of Christ appearing to Moses at the burning bush, when the angel of the Lord speaks to Moses from the burning bush as He calls upon Moses to take his sandals off because he is on holy ground. Thirdly, His presence makes everything where he stands, holy. What is holiness? It is declaring the uniqueness of God, not only in His righteousness but in His very existence. Holy means one of a kind. This is what Isaiah will witness in the heavens – holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3). It is not only holy in the normative but holy to the comparative and holy to the superlative. This is the attribute of all other attributes.

In other words, if you could only use one word to describe who God is without using His name, it would be holy. One might think, what about love? Certainly God is love but love doesn’t modify all the other attributes – holiness does. God’s wrath is holy. God’s love is holy. God’s grace is holy. God’s mercy is holy. It is the attribute that modifies all the other attributes – holy, holy, holy is the Lord God. Not only in His attributes but in His Person there is none like Him. He alone is God.

Fourthly, when Joshua worships and bows before Him he is not rebuked. If this was just an angel, when Joshua worshipped the angel, the angel would have rebuked him which is what happened to John in Revelation 19:10 and 22:9. The angel tells John to worship God alone, but Joshua is unrebuked in his worship. So this tells me it’s more than an angel. This is the second Person of the Trinity that has come, calling for worship, expecting worship, receiving worship and not rebuking the worship that is brought to Him. He is declaring the attribute of holiness for this is the Lord Himself, the Commander of the Lord of Hosts.

So here is the takeaway. The question of a Christian in the day of crisis reveals the alignment of our heart; God’s answers become the opportunity for the realignment of our heart. Our questions in the day of crisis not only gains information but they reveal information about our heart alignment. When God answers our questions one of the primary purposes of the answer is the realignment of our heart.

So after Joshua asks his question, by the Lord not answering his either or question He is basically telling Joshua it’s the wrong question. For the Lord is saying to Joshua ‘Your question should not be ‘am I on your side’ but your question should be ‘God am I on your side?’ God is the Commander; I have now come.

If you’re a Christian you will have crises that you encounter with joy knowing that the Lord is doing something. One of the things the Lord is doing is revealing your functional

alignment and giving a moment for realignment. I can understand Joshua because he is following Moses' leadership. Who can take Jericho? He has 12 tribes grumbling. His battle plan is to march around the city, blow a trumpet and the walls are going to fall down. Can you imagine one of the greatest military commanders coming up to Joshua and asking what his plan is to take Jericho and he responds with that battle plan? They would have thought he was crazy.

In the day of crisis, God has His plan and weapons for you in that battle/crisis. The world will always count God's weapons as foolishness and His strategy as ignorant, but you trust the Lord. Yes He is on your side. Hear what it says in Romans 8:31; [31] *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* He is not only on your side, but He is at your side and He is leading you into the crisis and only God can pull that off. He is the Commander. There is no place and nothing you ever face in a broken world with all of its crises that is virgin territory. Your Savior has always gone before you.

This is why it says in II Chronicles 20:12b, [12b] *For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but **our eyes are on you.*** This is why the writer of Hebrews when he lists all of those glorious witnesses of Christ unto death in Hebrews 11, then says in Hebrews 12:1–2, [1] *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Jesus is not the recruit to your army but you're the draftee into His army and you get realigned. It's not about you. When I came to Briarwood 21 years ago my first sermon I preached came from the Psalms. I didn't preach it so much for Briarwood but for myself. Psalm 115:1 says [1] *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* Why is this directed to me? When we're born we're not made into sinners for we are born sinners and that's why we sin. We are born with a sin nature. The very essence of the sin nature is that we're born thinking life is all about us.

We're not born with Catechism question number one which is **Q:** What is the chief end of man? **A:** Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. We are born with a sin nature and our question number one is what is the chief end of God, if there is one? Answer; It is to make me happy. Perhaps you are a Christian today and you have joined the Lord's army, but in the hustle, bustle and pot holes of life (the crises), it is so easy to get out of alignment so in the crisis our questions can show if we have slipped out of alignment.

I love living in Birmingham but we don't have the best roads in the world. If you don't dodge the holes you will have to go to the shop to get realigned. That's the way life is because we're living in a broken world. It could have to do with a crisis in your marriage, your family, your job, bearing witness for Christ, etc. and we see the world rising up to assault Christ's Church and it's so easy to see it from the vantage point of ourselves where we think we have to recruit God but God says 'no, it's not you, it's Me and I have recruited you. Fix your eyes on Me. I'm not one of your assets. You are My trophy of grace. I have weapons I have fashioned for you that are divinely designed to tear down walls and strongholds but you have to be aligned with Me.'

When you get aligned right there is about three evidences. One is that obedience becomes the delight of your life. If we love Him we'll keep His commandments. Secondly, your confidence will soar because it's not about you and God added to you but it's about Him and His redeeming work in you. Thirdly, people who have the alignment right are those who

worship because that is the foundation. Worship Me. Every Lord's Day with what you do or don't do, what you embrace or what you neglect, becomes the moment to declare your alignment and to get realigned if necessary.

The Commander of the Army of the Lord of Hosts said to Joshua that in order to get the right question is was to worship Him. Take your sandals off for you are on holy ground. You see life through Me, in Me and you see life following Me. That is where I have put you. Each Lord's Day God's people coming into worship, facing crisis in a broken world with everything that's around them, it's not about us but now comes alignment or realignment time in worship. It's about Him. Our eyes are fixed on Him – the Father, through the Son in the power of the Spirit.

Worship is foundational in this life and the vocation for eternal life where we'll worship Him forever and ever. What kind of worship is that? It is intentional, reverent and rejoicing. It rejoices without triviality. It is reverent without morbidity. I understand the purpose and meaning when they say come to our church for casual worship but I can never have that cross my lips. There is nothing casual about worship. It is the foundation of life. It aligns life and realigns life. It fixes our eyes on the Triune God of glory through the preeminence of Christ and it is the vocation of everlasting life. It is why He saved you – to the praise of His glorious grace.

After this Joshua son of Nun, 1400 years later another Joshua would come to Jericho. His name is Yeshua (Jesus), Son of God, Son of Man. Just like a prostitute is delivered in the ministry of the first Joshua (son of Nun), this Joshua (Jesus) will heal Bartimaeus, will bring Zacchaeus to everlasting life, will sit down to dinner and bring more prostitutes and tax gathers to Christ. Yeshua will come to Jericho 1400 years later, on His way to win us at the cross. As we saw today, it wasn't His first trip for He had already been there as the Commander of the Lord of Hosts.

Align your heart and your life on Him with worship to His Name's glory and in praise for He saves sinners. Take a few moments in silent prayer.

Prayer:

I would like for you to pray about two things. The first thing is, are you aligned with Jesus? You are aligned with something. You have either aligned yourself with the idols of this world that you think are going to deliver you in which they cannot or will not yet they will destroy you or you have aligned yourself with the only One who can save you. Today you can acknowledge that Jesus has come for you. He came at Jericho and 1400 years after that He came again and today He has come for you. Some of you have already come to Jesus but the potholes of life's crises, the pestilence, and the challenges have you out of alignment. That old man makes it so easy to go back to where it's all about you. I may need God to come along side of me but it's all about you – no! He is beside you, He is with you but He is in front of you. Fix your eyes on Him. He is not your recruit. You are His trophy. You're His soldier. He will lead you, the Commander of the Lord's Army, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The question of a Christian in the day of crisis reveals the alignment of our heart; God's answers become the opportunity for the realignment of our heart.

Crisis and the Christian in Biblical Perspective — Seven Lessons

Lesson #1: Live Sensibly, Righteous and Godly in the Present Age – Titus 2:11-14

Lesson #2: The Providences of a Sovereign God are seldom singular but Multi-faceted – Genesis 50

Lesson #3: The Foundational and Urgent Message in Every Crisis is to heed the Divine Call – Repent or Perish! – Luke 13

Lesson #4: The Foundational and Urgent Call in Every Crisis is a Commitment to Fervent Intercessory Prayer – Nehemiah 1

Lesson #5: The real Crisis in Every Crisis is how you respond to the crisis - Who is Your King and Savior? – Daniel 1

Lesson #6: The Faithfulness of God's People to the Faithfulness of God's Grace in a Crisis establishes a Witness for God and Multiplies Witnesses to God both willing and unwilling – Daniel 3

Lesson #7: The Questions of a Christian in a Crisis Reveals the Present Alignment of our Heart and God's Answers provide the opportunity for the Realignment of our Heart – Joshua 5: 13–15