

Joshua 5; Rev. 19:11-21; On Whose Side Are You I. The Question of Allegiance II. The Surprising Response III. The Assured Victory

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose side are you on? We tend to put people into different groups based on their affiliations. Having just finished an election, the question on our mind is- did you vote for the Republicans or the Democrats. Are you one of my people- are you for my party or against it? But let's say for a moment that after you ask this question about party affiliation, the person responds by saying "neither." That would be odd- because really there are only two options, right? Red or blue? But as we are going to see today- the more pressing question is this- are you on the side of the LORD? Those who are not on the side of the LORD are against Him in Matthew 12. So as we come to chapter 5 we find Israel engaging in worship once again before they begin the work of conquest. They need to be circumcised again because this generation has not received the sign of the covenant. And they celebrate the Passover. As you may remember from last week- the sign and seal- or the memorial- is a time to remember and believe. Putting this concept in today's language- it would be like getting baptized and celebrating the Lord's Supper before you enter the week of work. But before the Israelites begin their siege of Jericho, Joshua has this encounter with an armed soldier. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ challenges our allegiance by reminding us of His position as commander.

I. The Question of Allegiance

In our first point we consider the question of allegiance found in our text. So Joshua has prepared the people of Israel by purifying them- reminding them of their identity and their place within the covenant. The men would receive the mark of the covenant- the sign of circumcision. And the entire congregation would partake of the Passover Lamb- reminding them of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt the house of bondage. And now- into the inheritance to take possession! So Joshua is scouting out the land as he prepares for his first military battle in the Promised Land. This is not Joshua's first time in the land- but it is his first time as the leader of Israel's army. How exactly are we going to get into Jericho- how

are we going to deal with these walls. But as he looks up in v. 13 and find a man who is holding a drawn sword. Now this poses a problem- on whose side is this soldier? Is he one of Jericho's army- or does he belong to Israel? Is he for the Lord's people or against the Lord's people? On whose side are you- he asks. Are you for us or for them- are you a friend or a foe? Now this question is very normal- it would be a natural response. Wanting to know the intention of an armed man standing in front of you would be the natural response. Like running into another person in a dark alley- what are your intentions? We do the same thing all the time when we put people into our little categories. We tend to be very simplistic even in how we rate or group other people. Are they for us- or are they against our agenda. We size people up. But the problem is- we can even do this to God. We can put God in a box- thinking He will only bless people who agree with us and our plans. We tend to think of God being on board with our agenda- instead of making sure that we are following His! As Prov. 19 puts it- many are the plans in the mind of man, but it is the purposes of the LORD that endure. We can think of the wars fought in the past. For example, both sides of the Civil War believed that God was on their side. So the question we should be asking ourselves is not- is God on our side; but rather, are we on God's side? To say this another way, the right side of history is not the one that man approves of- rather the right side of history is the side God has approved of. We sometimes think that God is pro- USA. But is He? So are we living our lives as we want while expecting God to give us his stamp of approval- or are we submitting to His plan and commandments knowing that in obedience and submission there is His approval. Blessed are those who walk in the way of the LORD- not those who do their own thing and then ask God to bless it! God says- if you love me you will keep my commandments. We cannot ask for God's love while ignoring His word! Truly His ways are not our ways- His plans are so much higher than ours. Instead of thinking that God works for us- we must humble ourselves and put ourselves at His disposal!

II. The Surprising Response

Now although we know who this soldier is, Joshua did not at first. So it was not wrong of Joshua to ask the question of v. 13- this soldier looked like a normal man. But once this soldier speaks, Joshua responds in the only appropriate way he could! Joshua says- are you for us or are you for our enemies? The commander of the Lord's army says- no. The question is wrong- so the answer is- neither. Jesus does this often- He gets to the heart of the issue by asking questions and challenging assumptions. Joshua was not expecting to meet this Lord of hosts. And to be clear, this must be a reference to the Son of God in our passage. Notice how Joshua responds. He bows down in worship in v. 14. Worship is not fit for any other creature- so this is not just an angel. And his presence makes the ground holy in v. 15- which brings to mind Exodus 3:5 and the burning bush where Moses had to take off his sandals as well. And when this commander speaks in 6:2- it is the LORD who is speaking to Joshua. So this must be the Son of God appearing in human form- as the leader of God's army. And He tells Joshua- behold I have arrived! He has come! Now why has this commander come- and what is He going to do? The commander of the army of the Lord has not come on a peace keeping mission. Rather, this soldier has his sword drawn! He is not coming to bring peace- but a sword! You see, God's anger is about to put on display! The cup of His wrath is full- ready to be poured out. The iniquity of the Canaanites has reached its fulfillment- we are at a tipping point. So it is the Israelites that are being drafted into God's army- they are the agents of God's anger and wrath against sin. This commander is going to lead them forth. It is not Joshua who chooses this war- it is the LORD who chooses the time and the place. And upon hearing that the commander of the Lord's army has arrived- Joshua responds in the only appropriate way! He bows down, submits and worships. What does my lord say to his servant? I am at your disposal- my life in your hands. That is the proper response of all of God's people. We are in His army- our life in His hands! We belong to Him! It is also true that the presence of this commander would be of great encouragement as well. For if the LORD is leading us into battle, who can stand up to us? If God is for us, who can be against us? Truly the battle belongs to the Lord. With this knowledge- that the

commander of God's army is leading them- Joshua can have the courage to go forth and face the enemies. Being strong and courageous- because the LORD is fighting this battle!

III. The Assured Victory

With the Lord at the command of his army, the stage is set for the battle of Jericho. The question we will answer is this- who exactly fights the battle of Jericho? Whose sword goes forth? Our chapter ends with Joshua on his face- kneeling down with his face to the dust. He takes off his sandals to complete his prostrate position. This is not the normal position of someone about to wage war? This is not how you are supposed to act on the eve of battle! Shoeless and on your knees! But as Dt. 20 promises, For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory. Or from Psalm 3, From the LORD comes deliverance. As the Israelites go forth, as they follow after the Lord's commander, they will find safety and rest. However, if they turn their back on the Lord and forsake His work, God will remove His protective barrier. If they follow their divine commander, they will go from victory to victory. If they forsake him and go their own way, they will find defeat and death! As the book of Joshua unfolds, we will find that the Israelites followed the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders that were still living after Joshua died. But after this first generation dies out, people start to do what is right in their own eyes. At first in the book of the judges- and then after the judges as the people wanted a king like the nations. As Judges 2 reveals- another generation arose that did not know the Lord or the work He had done! They refused to follow their good commanded- their faithful leader and defended. But rather, they wanted leaders who were more like the nations- and thus God gave them the desires of their heart! When considering this promised victory, we know that Jesus will have victory over all in the end. The final victory is secured- and no man- no ruler and no power will be able to stand in His way! The battle in the book of Joshua is a small picture of what Jesus will do when He returns. I was struck by the feebleness of man's rebellion again this past week. I heard a quote from Governor Pritzger where he said- "To anyone who thinks that they can force some right-

wing war on a woman's body, you will never get one inch of Illinois." Bold words! As if a governor has the ability to defend an entire state from some war against abortion. I would rather listen to these words from Abraham Kuiper- "there is not one square inch of this whole domain over which Christ does not cry- mine!" The reign and rule of Christ over all- above all power and rulers and governors- is supreme! None can say to Him- what have you done- none can resist His plan! Let the rulers of this world take heed! Jesus is coming back- and His victory over all- His claim of all- will be complete! We read earlier from Rev. 19 where the final battle is portrayed. Jesus arrives on the scene riding a white horse. He is the captain of the Lord's armies- as Rev. 19:14 says- the armies of the heaven go forth- following Him! It is he that will capture and defeat the beast, the false prophet and the kings of this earth along with their armies. The sword of the Lamb will strike down every foe! Then this world will have peace! So the question we must ask ourselves is this- are you a citizen of His Kingdom? Are you a soldier in His army? If so, as you follow the Lamb- you will go forth to final victory! As I Cor. 15 states, thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To conclude, understanding our place in the presence of God is crucial if we are to understand our mission. Jesus Christ challenges our allegiance by reminding us of His position as commander. Is your life your own? No- I belong to my commander and lord! I am in His army- and He fight for me! As Israel did- we start our lives with worship! First worship- then comes the work! Washed at the water of baptism- fed at the Table of the LORD- now following our commander into battle. And as we follow after Him, we know that every foe will fall down before Him.