Among Us: God Made Visible in the Old Testament
Week 4: Joshua - Commander and Chief

I. We're continuing through a series of messages that focus on Christ in the Old Testament. Thank you to Dr. Kurnia and student ministry director Ben Hilton for the last few weeks! I heard wonderful things and I know God spoke clearly through both of you. Thank you for challenging us over the past few weeks!

A. Often when we consider Jesus, we think the beginning of the story was in Bethlehem on the first Christmas night. We know the Old Testament talks about the birth of Jesus through several prophecies that indicate what God will do, but we can miss the activity of God the Son in the Old Testament if we're not careful. It's important for us to recognize that Jesus is God, and if God, then co-eternal with the Father! There is distinction within the Godhead, but this distinction is anchored in an unassailable equality that has existed for all eternity between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. God the Son was not riding the bench in the Old Testament. He was orchestrating the will of the Father to bring about salvation to the ends of the earth. God's intention before creation was to dwell among humanity. To be their God and they, His people!

II. We're going to look at another passage today in which God physically manifests His presence through the preincarnate Christ. We would formally call this an Old Testament Theophany or Christophany which isn't a rare occurrence in the Old Testament. God is communicating something to His people through these events that His intentions are to:

Dwell Among Us!

A. Sin has separated humanity from God because God is holy. Holy is a term that means "set apart" or "pure." Holiness or purity isn't something measurable by degrees. God is either holy and pure or He isn't, but one can't be 99% pure. God wouldn't be defiled by our sin and therefor removed us from His presence. Praise Jesus this condition would not last forever! Even in the Old Testament, we see God the Son revealing the heart of the Father to pay the ultimate cost so that we might be reconciled to God!

B. Context - I would like for you to turn to Joshua 5:13-15 as I give some explanation for what occurs prior to this passage and immediately on its heels. The passages before and after gets a significant amount of press, but just like in our world today, the events and "news" that really needs to grab our attention are often excluded for more sensational stories. Joshua 5:13-15 is about the presence of the Lord in our preparation. We tend to focus on outcomes, but I was reminded time and again throughout my time in Chad of this important principle:

Our works for God must be grounded in our worship of God!

1. If our works for God outpace our worship of God we're heading for trouble. We need to unpack what it means to worship, and our text today will help us. But first let's place our passage in context.

2. The Book of Joshua is about God's people settling the Promise Land. 40 years prior they had left Egypt with this promise of God that He would give them the land of Canaan but once they discovered the challenge ahead, they opted for a 40-year trip around the Sinai desert. After Moses and the preceding generation died, God rose up Joshua to complete the task of resettling the Promise Land.

a. God gave the Israelites a reboot but using a similar process from 40-years prior. Spies go out, they get miraculously saved at a prostitute's house (God is something!) and they come back confident that God is before them. God then prepares the heart of His people by bringing them through the Jordan River on dry ground. We talk a lot about the parting of the Red Sea, but God does it again as the people are exiting the desert and entering the Promise Land. There is one addition though! He instructs the leaders from the 12 Tribes of Israel to grab a large stone from the middle of the river and place it on the bank after they cross. God tells them why they are to do this. When their children ask them what these stones are about, they are to tell them! "These stones came from the middle of the river, little Sussy." "I don't understand, Dad, how did you get stones from the middle of the river?" "We serve a God that has a way of making a way where there is no way!"

b. I pray we all have God stories that we share and celebrate in our homes!

c. Here's another principle for us today, if we're simply trying to pass along facts about God to our children, the faith will likely not take root. If we're depending on a Christian school or the church to pass along those facts about God to our children, it's very likely the faith will not take root.

If, however we are experiencing God and we're passing along the way in which God is working in our lives to our children, that is unmistakably contagious! God is preparing His people by anchoring their future in His past provision. The same must be true for our lives.

3. The beginning of the Book of Joshua is all about God preparing His people by locking them into His presence! This is the key! "Not by strength or by might, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts" (Zecheriah 4:6). It was the same for the Israelites and it's still the same for us today!

4. After they cross the Jordan, the next step of preparation is a reidentification as God's chosen people. The sign of God's covenant with Abraham was circumcision and circumcision had been placed on pause during the desert wandering. Before resettling the Promise Land, the Lord instructed Joshua to reestablish the covenant through circumcision. It was an outward indication of a spiritual reality that Israel was set apart as God's covenant people. The outward sign of God's covenant with us today is:
Baptism

a. That's why baptism is a vital part of our obedience to Jesus Christ because it isn't just a personal action. We're not as clear on this as we should be. Baptism is an outward identification of our relationship with Jesus AND it also identifies us with the body of Christ! Here in Joshua 5, God is reaffirming Israel's identity as His chosen people.

b. God has been preparing His people by tuning them into His presence. God is establishing His presence with His people by anchoring them in His past provision and reaffirming they are His people. We then get to the crescendo of Joshua 1-5 with God revealing His presence to Joshua in a remarkable way that is reminiscent of the passage Dr. Kurnia shared last week. I hope we're taking note!

c. Preparation isn't the prologue to God's story in our lives. Preparation and the awareness of God's presence in our lives is the position from which anything meaningful arises through our lives. Power comes through God's presence. We are simply a conduit.

C. In Joshua 6, Joshua will lead Israel into their first "battle" if we can call it a battle. It's an unconventional battle that involves walking around the walls and capping it off with trumpet blasts. Again, power doesn't come from within us. Our power comes from the presence of God. And we experience (I prefer that word as opposed to "enter") the presence of God through:
Worship

1. Worship isn't an event. Worship isn't something we go and attend. Worship isn't restricted to music, Sundays, or having other Christians around. Worship is positioning our entire lives in submission to our Great God who is holy and pure and utterly other and yet has taken on the fullness of being human to rescue us from our sin. The God who is other and yet has empowered the Son to bring about salvation so we can be reconciled to God. God would be worthy of worship even if He left us in eternal damnation, but how much more is He worthy of our worship in response to the unfathomable love demonstrated to us by God through the gift of His Son.

2. How did Joshua respond to the presence of the LORD? Let's dive in!

Joshua 5:13-15 - 13 When Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua approached him and asked, "are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied. "I have now come as commander of the LORD's army." Then Joshua bowed with his face to the ground in worship and asked him, "what does my lord want to say to his servant?" 15 The commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did that.

What a remarkable passage of Scripture that is sandwiched between God's preparation of His people to enter the Promise Land and the first opposition they'll face at Jericho. Joshua has this experience in the LORD's presence that most students of Scripture believe to be the preincarnate Christ! It's just a few short verses but there's some major things we learn about a posture of worship and how a posture of worship unlocks the floodgates of God's power through our lives. We'll have to save it for another day, but Jericho falls without one Israelite lifting a sword and that is the point. It was a miraculous work of God! The power of God works through the people of God when they experience His presence!

3. As Joshua was nearing Jericho there was someone standing in front of him. Between the place of preparation and the immediate challenge that lie ahead, Joshua encounters a man and wants to know

whose side the man is on? In other words, Joshua is asking, "are you one of us or are you one of them?" This is a logical question. The people of God are prepared for battle and the people of Jericho are prepared for battle and in the middle, there stands a man with a sword. He's got to be on one side or the other, right? What's the answer?

Neither

a. This man is not here to do the bidding of one side or the other, He is the commander of the LORD's army! Joshua asked if this man was on his side. That was the wrong question to ask the very One who is in charge. The only relevant question for Joshua to answer was that he (Joshua) was on this Man's side! This is the correct way to enter into worship. How much effort do we exert trying to convince God to get on our side? "God, I've got this problem and I need you to work it out. Are you on my side or not?" I really do feel bad for bursting all our bubbles today, but God is not on our side. We should hesitate in using that language. Scripture cautions us against this. The question isn't about God being on our side, but whether we're on His side! It wasn't about Israel, and it wasn't about Jericho, it was about the commander of the LORD's army! Joshua picks up what the LORD was laying down!

b. How do we know?

Joshua got down and hit the ground in a response of worship! And worship reoriented Joshua's thinking! Joshua's next question was 180 degrees different from the previous one.

What does my lord want to say to his servant?

4. Worship is our response to the authority and supremacy of God in all things including our very lives! Worship is always reorienting because we gravitate toward self. Worship transfers the value away from the things of this world and places that value back where it rightfully belongs on Almighty God. True worship results in a perspective shift from what God needs to do for me to what I might do in response to the creator God who has allowed me to experience Him personally. This is how we know we've had a genuine encounter with God: we long for His will to manifest in our life believing that no matter the circumstances, He is in control and bringing about good in all things.

5. The commander of the LORD's army did have something to say to Joshua and it further solidifies the full extent of the encounter Joshua had that day.

Joshua 5:15 - "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did that.

Holy means pure or set apart. Holiness isn't a matter of degrees or percentages. One cannot be 99% pure. Holy is all or nothing. Joshua, like Moses, was commanded by the Commander to remove his shoes because He was in the very presence of the LORD. That is the best place to be because it is in the presence of the LORD that the power of the LORD is ushered through our lives. Just read Joshua 6 and see what occurred because the Israelites remained in the presence of the LORD.

D. God doesn't play the game of hide and seek although it sometimes feels that way. What is really occurring is that God loves us too much to simply "be on our side." Stop and say those words slowly and think about how absurd those words are in connection to the Almighty God. Do we really want Almighty God to "be-on-OUR-side?" Between our preparation and the problems of life we face our response, which is to worship God and out of that worship acknowledge that He alone is Holy. He's perfect and pure. We humble ourselves before God and say, "Lord, what would you say to me? Your servant is listening."