

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever wondered if God is on your side? I bet you've all done this, but you don't always recognize it. A couple weeks ago, my wife and I went shopping. We were in a bit of a hurry, and as we drove into the store's parking lot, we immediately spotted an awesome parking spot. As I slipped right into it, she declared, "God must be on your side." Or "God is watching out for you."

Have you ever thought something like that? Everyone in your family gets sick, but you don't. Well, God must be on your side, right? You play the lottery and win a \$100 prize. God must be on your side. God must be on your side. You get cancer, and beat it! God must be on your side. You find your dream house and get it at a great price. God must be on your side. You make an incredible play in whatever sport it is that you play, and your team wins! God must be on your side. The United States defeats her enemies in World War 2. God must have been on our side.

But it works the other way too, doesn't it? You're the only one in the family to get sick. You never win the lottery. Your cancer is terminal. You're upside down on the mortgage of a house you didn't like much in the first place. You flub the play that would have been the game winner. Our country occasionally gets hammered by terrorist. Maybe these are evidences that God is not on our side.

And it gets more complicated. I do what is wrong, yet there is a favorable outcome. Does this mean God approved of the wrong I did and he's on my side? Or I do right (when it could have been easy to do wrong), yet I pay for it! There is a negative consequence. Even though I did right, was God not on my side?

So let's talk about this today under the theme: "**Whose Side?**" The answer to this question may surprise you. The answer is probably not what you are expecting. To help us find the answer regarding whose side God is on, we will look at some fascinating verses that you may not be that familiar with. Now if you grew up going to Sunday School, you are probably familiar with the story about the Fall of Jericho. But what you may not be familiar with is what immediately preceded that account. Joshua 5:13 starts like this: "**Now 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 went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"**"

We are about to find out that the man standing in front of Joshua with his sword drawn is actually the LORD! So essentially Joshua is asking the Lord the same question we so often want to ask him. God, are you on my side or not? Are you for me or not? God's answer to Joshua's question is fascinating! But first let me give you some background.

BACKGROUND: This was not the first time Joshua stood near Jericho. God had led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. He brought them right up to the border of the Promised Land. Before they entered the land, Moses sent 12 scouts or spies into the country. These spies took a good look at Jericho and the rest of the country too. When they came back, 10 of the 12 spies said, "There's no way we can take this country. The cities are built up and heavily fortified. The people are well armed and they are like giants compared to us! If we try to take the land God promised us, we will be destroyed!" But two scouts had a different

recommendation. Those two dissenting scouts were Joshua and Caleb. The Israelites were beginning to grumble and did not want to take the land. Joshua and Caleb addressed the people saying; **“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” Numbers 14:7-9**

In other words, Joshua and Caleb were the only ones that understood that to refuse to take this land that God promised... to not fight when God said the victory would be theirs... was rebellion. The people still refused to fight. God was angry and announced his judgment: 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and during that time everyone 20 or older would die and that generation would not see the Promised Land. Meanwhile, the 10 spies who gave a bad report died of a plague God sent. Suddenly the people said, “Oh, never mind! We will take the land!” Moses warned them that to try to take it would be to disobey God yet again. But they tried. And they were beaten down handily.

Fast forward 40 years. Joshua, who now must have been 80 years old or more is preparing to lead the people into the land. Moses has recently died and Joshua is the new leader of the people. Joshua is now standing exactly where he had been 40 years ago, but this time they would not rebel against God. They would take the land that God had promised them.

Now, let me read the whole text, and then we’ll talk about the significance of this amazing text.

Joshua 5:13-6:5

13 Now 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 went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

14 “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

15 The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

6 Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

2 Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 3 March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”

So Joshua goes out, apparently by himself, *near Jericho*. Was he doing some scouting? We’re not told. But this is a critical time for the people of Israel. This was the juncture where they had failed 40 years earlier. This is where they rebelled against God by being afraid!

And remember, Jericho was a city that was armed and extremely well defended. It had high, thick walls. The siege of a city like this could often take a couple YEARS as the attacking

army had no choice but to just sit there until the people inside began to starve and would finally in desperation surrender or open the gates to attack. But this wasn't an option for Israel. They weren't going to wait 2 years for a single city in the Promised Land. God wanted them to somehow attack it!

“Joshua looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. So before Joshua is this warrior. A man who was not only armed but who had his sword drawn in his hand. This is a man ready to fight. In our day, it's a man with his pistol drawn and the safety off. How would feel approaching a strange person with weapon drawn.

Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

When it says Joshua “went up” that means he boldly approached him. Joshua challenged him. Joshua got in his face. In Joshua's mind, the battle was already started. They were going to attack Jericho. Joshua just gives him two options. Are you for us or for our enemies? You can either fight me to death if you are our enemy, or you can fight for us. There was no neutral.

So just two options: are you for us or against us? The man answers: “No.”

No? Are you on our side or their side? No. Are you friend or foe? No. Did Joshua pause and scratch his head? That's not an possible answer!

14 “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.”

The man rejected both answers. He essentially says, “The question isn't whether or not I am for or against you. The question is whether you are for or against me. The question isn't whether I'm on your side. The question is whether you are on my side.” This person standing before Joshua was the commander of the army of the Lord. So the question is whether or not Joshua is for or against him!

This is so important! Do you see the difference? If the man said, “I am on your side.” That would mean that Joshua was the one in charge, and this man would support him. To say he is for Joshua's enemies would mean that he opposes Joshua. Neither answer was correct. Because this is the Lord and he is the one who is in charge of all things. Joshua can either be on his side, or against him. That's the only side there is.

Imagine as you board an airplane, you see the pilot and say, “I plan to get this plane safely to its destination. Are you with me or against me?” The pilot would look at you funny. You're not calling the shots on this aircraft, he is. He would have every right to respond. “Neither. I am the captain of this aircraft.”

That's what this person responds to Joshua. He says, “I have come as the command of the army of the Lord.” Meaning, “I'm the one in charge. So the question is whether you are on my side!”

Now, who is this command of the army of the Lord? Listen:

Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

15 The commander of the Lord's army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

So is this an angel? Or is this the Lord? Look at Joshua's action. He hits the dirt. And he says, “Command me.” Joshua falls in submission and worship before him. Then he is told to take off his sandals. He is standing in the presence of the holy God. Who is this? This is Jesus.

Why not an angel? Angels are not the center of any story they are a part of. And angels do not allow you to worship them. In Revelation, John fell down to worship an angel that had shown him amazing visions, but the angel said, “Don't do it! I am a fellow servant.” We have a culture that has a fascination with angels, but the truth is, angels are not above us or over us.

They are along side us. They serve God. We serve God. We have different roles. But our status before God is equal... they don't out rank us. So don't worship an angel. Don't bow before one. Don't pray to angels. They are servants of God like you.

But Joshua worships this commander, and he is not stopped. In fact, he is told to go further and remove his sandals, for his is standing in in the presence of the one who is holy. *"Step up your worship! Your reverence is insufficient!"* You are in the presence of the Holy, the Uncreated, the Commander.

So who is this? This is God in human form coming to earth to deliver his people. This is Jesus before he ever received the name Jesus. This is the 2nd of person of the Trinity who intervenes in human history to accomplish God's salvation plan. This is a foretaste of the Big Intervention... when the time had fully come God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under the law... you and me.

This isn't the only place. There are a number of places in the Old Testament where THE Angel of the Lord comes. He is worshiped. He speaks as if he is God (because he is.) He is a preliminary manifestation of the 2nd person of the Trinity, whose specialty is to come to us and to be a channel between us and the LORD.... To restore us to God. He comes from God and he is God. He has a message from the LORD and he is the Lord. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the word was God."

So what picture of Jesus Christ does this give us? He is a warrior who comes to fight for his people. We have this image of Jesus as a softy. A gentle being who would never raise his voice or lift a weapon. See this warrior standing before Joshua with sword drawn ready to fight. But he's not fighting with us... he's not fighting against us. This is his battle. He is fighting it alone. He is defeating our enemies without our help and assistance. He is the one calling the shots, the one who is in control. So the question is: Are you on *his* side or not?

This is the challenge of every human being. Going back to Adam and Eve, we have wanted to be the ones in control. "I am the commander of my life! I call the shots in my life! I only want to know, God, are you with me or against me? Whose side are you on, God?!" Adam and Eve were created knowing God calls the shots and he is in control. Then Satan came along and told them they could be like God. They could be commanders like God and decide for themselves what was Good and what was Evil. They took the bait and declared themselves commanders of their own lives. And they fell... hard. They had been on God's side, but now they were declaring they were against God.

We do the same thing. We like to believe that we command our own lives. I will determine what is good for me. I will decide what is bad for me. I will make my plans and plot my course. I will decide what is important and how I will achieve it. I will seek to make a name for myself as I command my life. I will strive for earthly riches and acknowledgment. I want others to marvel at how I command my life. And then we dare to call out to God, "So, God, are you on my side as I command? Or are you against me?!" And we think we see signs for or against.

And Jesus says, "No. NEITHER." I am the Commander of the Lord's Armies. I am the commander of the universe. I am in control of all things. I am the master of your life. So the question is, are you going to listen to me? Will you accept my command? Or will you continue to rebel?

Jesus shows himself to be a worthy commander who deserves our reverence and worship and our shoes off before him. Jesus carries a sword, because he is all about the battle. And the battle he fights is the one for our eternal salvation. The stakes are high and the battle is fierce. The final battle took place in Palestine 2000 years ago. There were just two combatants: Satan and Jesus. Satan thought he had defeated his enemy. He and his forces took the Son of God captive, abused him, tortured him, and hung him to die on a splintered wooden cross. Satan only recognized his mistake when it was too late. Moments before his death, Jesus, the Commander of the Lord's Armies, cried out loudly in victory. "It is finished!" Paid for! Complete! My work is done and I am victorious!" I can only imagine Satan's reaction at that moment. "Complete? Finished? What? How?... NO!!!!" With Jesus' death the punishment for each of our sins was paid for in full. Christ's perfect life conquered Satan and sin. Christ's death on the cross was a death of victory that paid all of what sinful mankind owed. I wonder if while Jesus was in the tomb, Satan thought, "Maybe he won't rise. Maybe he won't rise. Please don't rise!" But he did. And the victory was sealed. And our enemy was defeated once and for all. Jesus the mighty warrior won the decisive victory which guarantees our deliverance and life with God forever.

So whose side are you on? Joshua immediately went face in the dirt and sandals off in reverence to Christ. Should our reaction be any different? Won't we this day declare with our words and actions, "I am on YOUR side, Commander of the Lord's armies! What is your command?! What will you have me do? How may I serve you? Direct me! Command me! I will do your bidding in every area of my life. I will take captive my thoughts to conform them to your will. I will change my words to please you in everything. You are my master. You are the Holy One. You are the one in control. You take the throne in my heart! I live for you and you alone. I yield to your command!

A quick word of warning. When you yield to God, life doesn't always make sense. "Joshua, this battle of Jericho isn't your battle. It's my battle. So do this: **"March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."**

Can you imagine the reaction when Joshua brought those marching orders to his army? Are you crazy?! But they did it. They decided God didn't need to fight on their side. They needed to be on God's side. And here's what happened: **Joshua 6:20 When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.**

Friends, stop imagining you're in control, and the things that happen in your life indicate that God is on your side... or not. That's a total misunderstanding of the way things are. This universe belongs to God. And your life belongs to God. He is in command, not you. The question is not whether he is on your side... the question is, are you on his side? Do you live your life asking the question: "Lord, what is your command?" In this relationship, in my family, in my career, in my purchases, in my offerings, Lord, what is your command?

Let's pray...