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WHOSE SIDE ARE WE ON?

Joshua 5:13-15

1. The Commander in Chief

- *Daniel 10:13, 21, 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7-9, 17:14, 19:14-16; Exodus 3:5, 14; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; Romans 14:11-12; Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:9-11*

2. Whose Side is God On?

- *2 Thessalonians 3:10; Luke 12:33; Acts 4:32-37; Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:31; Joshua 5:14-15*

3. Whose Side are You On?

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**Kings and Presidents
Whose Side Are We On?
Joshua 5:13-15**

Today's political climate seems more confused and corrupt than ever. When I think back over my short life, I think of times of political turmoil like the Civil Rights movement of the sixties, The Viet Nam war and the near impeachment of President Nixon, the oil embargo and the "malaise" of the Carter administration. All of those were clearly contentious, but I don't think I've ever seen the poisonous vitriol that is being spewed out on the national stage as we are seeing right now. Nor do I ever recall in US history two candidates who are less appropriate for the office of president.

We have on one side a man who at least *appears* to be an egomaniacal, greedy, misogynistic narcissist, and on the other side we see a woman who at least *appears* to be a pathological liar who is beholden to the highest bidders whether national friend or enemy, who was criminally negligent at the cost of American lives and security, and so far has shown that the rules don't apply to her (at least if we can believe anything the news tells us). And that's just the two major parties; there are 29 third party candidates and 492 write-in candidates.

How are we as Christians to decide? And the problem is that after decades of the church in the US parlaying its political influence through the Moral Majority and other Christian lobbyists, we have played ourselves into a corner. Our own faith seems to be compromised in both directions as one side foolishly plays us, and the other side rightfully disdains and dismisses. We are left compromised and wounded with our integrity in question.

Never before have I known of a time that neither party candidate is popular even among his and her own constituents. So what do we do? Do we vote for them anyway? Do we *not* vote? Do we vote not for the candidate, but according to party platforms? We risk compromising there, too, as there are significant issues in both parties that are directly against clear biblical principles; things like war and abortion and poverty. The Christian is faced with either ignoring or excusing each party's candidate's actions, regardless of which party he or she aligns with.

What if a faithful approach to politics isn't about whose candidate will win? What if God is asking us to be citizens of the Kingdom that has real implications for our neighborhoods and real hope for our country, but is not determined by popular votes?

Today we begin a four part sermon series called "Kings and Presidents," a series on Kingdom people in our world of politics. We will finish this series on the Sunday before election day.

Part of the reason we spent the summer going through the book of Revelation was to help us get oriented around our loyalties, and to make sure that we aren't growing too accustomed to the American culture that we live in, which if you remember, by all the signs of Revelation, America is a Babylon along with other nations (You can get those messages online, or download the entire series in a pdf file).

But I'll be honest: last spring we planned on doing this sermon series starting today, and we did so with the intent of giving you some guidelines on how to make a decision when you vote. But we never would have predicted that we'd be where we are now. For months now, each new week brings a new low, with more horrible revelations about the levels of depravity that each candidate has sunk to. We are passed wondering about candidates and are asking if we should even vote at all.

You also need to know that I do not feel it is my responsibility to tell you who to vote for; only to tell you Who to live for. And I trust that the One you live for will inform you how you should vote or even if you should vote. In "Kings and Presidents," we will gain perspective and direction. And we will do so by looking at examples from the history of God's people, Israel.

Long before Israel demanded a king, they were about to enter the Promised Land. Under Moses' leadership, God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and to the edge of the Promised Land. They sent spies into the land, which came back with a faithless and fearful report. The people rebelled, and as a result, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Then Moses had gone to God, and Joshua was leading in his place. Once again the Israelites were about to take the Promised Land, and Joshua once again sent spies in to check things out. The spies scouted things out, escaped with the help of a woman named Rahab, and brought back to Joshua their report. They crossed the Jordan River and were poised to move against the highly fortified city of Jericho. What happened next is going to guide our conversation today. The Israelites knew they needed to overthrow Jericho, but they didn't yet know how they were going to do it; it had high walls and impenetrable defenses. Many of us know that they marched around that city for seven days and God himself destroyed the huge, multi-layered walls. But what we want to learn from today took place before all of that.

Joshua, the Commander of the Lord's people, is in the plains of Jericho when he encounters another Soldier, and it's clear to Joshua that this man is a Warrior.

(This is such a great story!) Let's pick it up there:

"When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a Man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to Him and demanded, 'Are You friend or foe?' 'Neither one,' He replied. 'I am the Commander of the LORD's army.' At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. 'I am at Your command,' Joshua said. 'What do You want Your servant to do?' The Commander of the LORD's army replied, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did as he was told." (Joshua 5:13-15, nlt)

The point of all this is powerful. From this amazing snapshot of a moment in time in Israel's history – long before they had their first king – we are going to see where *our* loyalty lies in *our own* land of kings and presidents. So first, see...

1. The Commander in Chief

Joshua is the commander of Israel's army, and God has worked through them to do some amazing miracles already. But before they launch into their conquest of Canaan, Joshua encounters *his own* Commander, the Commander in Chief, with the appearance of this heavenly being.

There are times in the Old Testament where heavenly warriors or messengers make appearances, so the question for us in this story is, was this appearance one of an angel, or was this God? Well, there *are* times that it appears people in the Old Testament encountered angel warriors and angel messengers. And the angel in this story does identify himself of the Commander of the Lord's army, so he could be the angel Michael, who is the archangel, or leader of the angel army (Daniel 10:13, 21, 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7-9). But in this case, there are *other* issues that leave little to doubt who this is. This heavenly appearance is what's called a *theophany*, which means it is God appearing in human form. Let me quickly show you why: We know this angel is not just any warrior, but a *very* high-ranking commander of Heaven because of the Hebrew words that are used to describe him.

Also, did you notice that this warrior was alone? The fact that he was alone, and not with another messenger, also set him apart, because typically in the Old Testament when there were angel visitations, they arrived in pairs. For example, look at the appearances in Sodom and Gomorra, or the appearances to Abraham and Sarah.

So there are unique words and there is only one visitor. Those are indicators, but the following reasons were even *more* significant:

First, you'll notice that Joshua bowed down to worship this angel, and the commander angel does not stop him. All throughout the Bible, angels do *not* allow themselves to be worshipped, because they know *only God* deserves worship. This angel, however, does not interrupt Joshua's bowing down before him; he lets Joshua do it.

Then the angel commanded Joshua to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. An angel cannot make the place of his presence holy; only God would make the ground holy. Does "holy ground" sound familiar? Is that in another story? This is intentionally the same thing that God told Moses when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). God himself commissioned Moses to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt. Now Joshua followed Moses as the leader of God's people. So it was important for God to validate Joshua's vital leadership in exactly the same way.

Finally, the story goes from this encounter to say that the Lord (God) then gives Joshua instructions about how they are going to defeat Jericho by marching around it. In other words, Scripture records their conversation and refers to the commander as "YHWH," which is the name God gave for himself to Moses and his people (Exodus 3:14).

I think those are reason enough to remove any doubt about the identity of this angel. The point is clearly made that God himself is the Commander of all commanders, the Chief of all Chiefs. In Revelation, which is the last book of the Bible, it describes the last great battle between the forces of Satan and the Kingdom of God. The Commander in Chief appears:

"Together they will go to war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because He is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. And His called and chosen and faithful ones will be with Him." (Revelation 17:14, nlt)

And again it says:

"The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed Him on white horses. From His mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing

from a winepress. On His robe at His thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.” (Revelation 19:14-16)

There is no doubt about who is Lord! The Bible says:

“For at just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:15-16, nlt)

Jesus himself is the commander in chief of this story, and he is *our* commander-in-chief. He is the Lord of all nations and people and parties and even all creation! And by the way, don't you think our country would be better off if our elected officials would readily recognize whom *their* commander-in-chief is? The Bible says that one day, they *will*:

“For the Scriptures say, ‘As surely as I live,’ says the LORD, ‘every knee will bend to Me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.’ Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.” (Romans 14:11-12, nlt [Isaiah 45:23])

And again it says:

“Therefore, God elevated Him to the place of highest honor and gave Him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11, nlt)

Of course, it would be better if our presidents and leaders would acknowledge Jesus *now*, instead of when they are forced to later. But let there be no doubt; Jesus is Lord of the Republicans and the Democrats and every other party and race and tribe and tongue.

So Joshua is confronted with the commander, and he asked him the same question we are being asked to consider in this election season:

2. Whose Side is God On?

Notice that Joshua asked him, “Are you for *us*, or for our *enemies*?” What is interesting about that question is what's implied in it; it reveals an arrogant implication on Joshua's part. Joshua is saying, “God, we are right, aren't we? You are on *our* side, aren't you?” It's not really a question, it's an assumption, and it is very much like what we see today: it seems that those who are Republicans think God is on their side, and Democrats assume he would be on their side. So which is it?

There's a story about a man who had lived in a small town and had been a staunch Democrat all his life. Now, he was 90, and his health began to fail. His doctor told him: “George, I'm sorry to tell you this, but, from the state of your health, I'd say you'll not live beyond the year.” The next morning, the old man asked his son to take him down to the courthouse so he could change his voter registration from Democrat to Republican.

His son protested, “But Dad, you started this town's Democrat Party and you attended every function since then. Why would you want to become a Republican?” The old man said, “Son, if someone has to die, it might as well be one of them.”

For the sake of fairness, here's another story: a first grade teacher in the Midwest was explaining to her class that she is a Democrat and how nice it would be if a new Democrat president took office. She asked her students to raise their hands if they, too, were Democrats. Everyone in class raised their hands except one little girl. The teacher was surprised, so she asked the girl, "Mary, why didn't you raise your hand?" Mary said, "Because I'm not a Democrat." "Well, what are you?" asked the teacher. The little girl said, "I'm a Republican and proud of it." The teacher couldn't believe her ears. "My goodness, Mary, why are you a Republican?" "Well, my momma and papa are Republicans, so I'm a Republican, too." "Well," the teacher said in an annoyed tone, "that's no reason for you to be a Republican. You don't always have to be like your parents. What if your momma was a criminal and your papa was a criminal; too, what would you be then?" Mary smiled. "Then we'd be Democrats."

Okay, so back to our question: whose side is God on?

Well, if you were to read the Bible looking for either Democratic or Republican Party policies, you'd find plenty of both. For example, the Bible clearly teaches that we are expected to work for what we get:

"Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: 'Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.'" (2 Thessalonians 3:10, nlt)

That's mostly a Republican approach to the economy. So we can forget those entitlements like welfare, right? But wait – Jesus said,

"Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven!" (Luke 12:33, nlt)

...and the Bible says of the early church:

"There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need." (Act 4:34-35, nlt)

This is clearly a Democratic ideal of caring for the poor among us. So which is it?

You can do the same thing for the democratic move toward socialism (it could be interpreted as what happened in Acts 4:32-37), and yet in those same passages people are described as *willingly giving* of their own property (vs 32, 37) – property they earned and bought and willingly gave, rather than being ordered or taxed to.

There are many examples you can find in Scripture of both party's agendas. So what does that mean? It means this, and I want you to hear me carefully: the Bible was not intended to be a political party platform! The Bible describes the character and nature of a God who loves people and would go to every length possible to rescue people from sin and death, and for people to know his love, to be called his children, to be free from sin, and to be citizens of heaven. The Bible was never intended to be a blueprint for partisan politics!

There are two types of interpretation when studying Scripture: exegesis and eisegesis. Exegesis means that you study the Scripture to find the meaning in the passage. It means "to draw the meaning out from it." Eisegesis is when you study the Scripture to find meaning in the passage that is *not* there. It means, "to place meaning into it." Exegesis (drawing out) is good. Eisegesis (putting in) is NOT good. If you are proof-texting the Bible to justify your politics, that is using the Bible for what was never intended, it is eisegesis, and you've got it all wrong!

Our exegesis of this story of Joshua's encounter with God tells us that God is on *neither* side, and at the same time he is on *both* sides. God is on the side of *God*. And God is always on the side of *all* people. He sent his Son to die for *all* people. *All* people are made in his image. And God is on *your* side! He loves you more than anything:

“I have loved you, My people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to Myself.” (Jeremiah 31:3, nlt)

The Message Translation says it this way: “I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!” God is for *you* and for every one of us. If you are a democrat, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a republican, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a libertarian, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a human being, *a person*, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life.

“What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31, nlt)

So Joshua asks God, “Are you a Republican or a Democrat?” and God says, “Neither one. I am the Commander of the LORD's army.”

And that declaration causes an immediate reaction from Joshua:

“At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. ‘I am at Your command,’ Joshua said. ‘What do You want Your servant to do?’ The Commander of the LORD's army replied, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did as he was told.” (Joshua 5:14-15, nlt)

This, my friends, is the point of all of this: Joshua wanted to know which side God had allegiance too. And God answered it by saying, “Neither side. What I want to know is will you be allegiant to me?” And like Joshua, our only response should be to fall down in humility and worship him as Commander and King.

So the answer to the question of whose side is God on, the answer to that question is another question:

3. Whose Side Are You On?

The answer to Joshua's question (about whose side God was on), was indicated in an action by Joshua: to take off his shoes and to kneel before God. If you have come to this place today asking the question, “whose side is God on?” you are now faced with the same choice: will you acknowledge God in Christ as the commander-in-chief of your life? Joshua recognized that this was the Great God, so he took off his shoes. Joshua recognized that God was asking him whether or not he would give his total allegiance. And Joshua said, “Tell me what you want me to do, and I will do it.”

Will you say that to God today? Will you recognize him as Christ the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Will you bow before him and tell him you will do whatever he asks?

This is far more important than any political party, and right now, in this place, it is more important than any presidential election. Will you settle this with Jesus? If you have not

accepted him in your life, you can do so today. Or maybe you would say you already have. So will you bow before him and give him your allegiance (ahead of your political persuasion)?

Pray

Let me tell you something: if you recognize that Jesus is Lord of your life, and you live for him and obey him, he will direct you through the Holy Spirit. I'm telling you: don't say you are a republican and try to force Jesus into your side. Don't say you are a democrat and use Jesus to justify your side. You must be on the side of the Kingdom of God – on Jesus' side, and then like Joshua, ask him what he wants you to do. Then worshipfully follow Jesus with your life. Deal with that first before you worry about our next president.