Who’s Side Are You On?
God of War. Joshua 5:13-15

This is like a scene from Lord of the Rings. I can see it in my mind. Joshua, the mighty warrior and leader, must have been out to canvas Jericho for himself. *When Joshua was by Jericho,* I can see the rocky mountains and hills and the majestic city in the background. I’m thinking about how I’ve read generals are just before great battles. He gets away from the camp deep in thought, going through different scenarios. He’s got butterflies. He’s spending some time alone with God. It says *he lifted up his eyes and looked,* which might mean he was praying. This would be appropriate: 1. Israel was at a spiritual high point as they had remembered and rededicated themselves after crossing the Jordan. 2. Tensions must have been high as they anticipated this great battle, and their alert level was up—particularly if they were still recovering from the circumcision. 3. Joshua was most likely startled as this guy seems to have appeared from nowhere. It says, *and behold,* which can sometimes have that connotation. Tension builds even more when Joshua sees, *a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand.*—like he’s ready for a fight! There are two other times in the Bible that we see an angel with a drawn sword: Balaam & David. In both instances the sword-bearer was sent by God to kill. *This warrior is to be respected.* My imagination takes over here. What this guy looked like—I imagine he was quite imposing—big & strong, clothed & girded for battle with an impressive suit of armor. How did Joshua respond to this guy? Did he draw his sword, too? Did he approach him ready for a dual between champions? *“Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”* Was there an initial clash of metal blades? I wish Joshua was more descriptive! It’s definitely a tense moment!! Even more interesting is the mighty warrior’s reply. *“No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.”* What does he mean by “No”? I looked this up in different translations. Several translate it, “Neither.” Either way, he is saying to Joshua, *“You’re asking the wrong question! The question is not who’s side I’m on. The question is who’s side are YOU on.”* 

—Abraham Lincoln

But we do not learn this lesson. We want to do things our way and then we have the audacity to ask God to bless us, help us, & make us prosper as we do what we think is best—even when our motivations are entirely selfish. I don’t know what’s worse: *ignoring God and doing our own thing as if he doesn’t exist,* OR doing our own thing and *asking him to help us*—as if we are in charge and *he is our servant.* What presumption and arrogance. *Who do we think we are?* Does God exist to serve us? No. We exist to serve *him,* worship *him,* bring glory to *him!* Understanding this is key when we’ll later consider the hard questions of why God will allow the carnage of the battles we’ll read about in Joshua—and for that matter—human wars today. God doesn’t operate according to our priorities, our economy, our timetables, our logic, and with our limitations. He is God. He is sovereign. He *uses* all the variables: our wars, our stupidity, our aspirations—including our sin—to accomplish *his* purposes for this world. It’s called *providence.* He is not beholden to us. We are subject to him! Let’s determine that he will use our *obedience* instead!

That’s the choice before Joshua when he asked this warrior who’s side he was on. The answer he got made it clear that he’d better understand who’s in control—*who the real commander is.* The real commander had come. How did Joshua respond? *And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him,* *“What does my lord say to his servant?”* 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.

Commentators debate exactly who this commander was. Some: a real man from a group of God-worshippers already in Canaan. *Doubtful.* Can’t imagine having to take sandals off. Many: a ranking angel, like Michael. Some recognize similarities with the “Angel of the Lord” who was a representative of God, as if God is there. Others think this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

Not important. What is? Joshua immediately realizes this warrior is God’s angel or God himself and bows down & worships.

I’ve got 3 questions:

1. *Are you asking God to be on your side?* If so, that’s the wrong question. Or are you asking, *“What is God’s side so I can join HIM?”* Even though we might not see it, God’s in command. His will cannot be thwarted. In fact, his armies are at work. Don’t forget: he will have the last word.
2. How can we know God’s side? Jesus said, His side is found in his word. Luke 6: 46 “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? 47 Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” John 8: 31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 17:17 Jesus: “Your word is truth.” Psalm 119:160 (HCSB) The entirety of your word is truth, and all your righteous judgments endure forever. Do you believe this? That will determine everything else.

What’s your world view? What I’m talking about here is a biblical worldview. A worldview is how you see and interpret the world. So many factors make up how we interpret our world—how we respond in our hearts to everything around us: the news, the police and authorities, how we vote, how we deal with people around us, how we approach living in general. Our upbringing, our culture, our good and bad experiences, our education, our faith—all these factors and more make us who we are and influence our opinions and actions. But the Christ-centered believer determines to think Christianly.

We don’t think like the world. Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 John 2:15-17 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Thinking Christianly means thinking differently.

As Christians, our loyalty is to Christ’s kingdom. Human loyalties must subordinate. We are to always conform to God’s priorities, not human affiliations, parties, identities, aspirations, and plans—even our own! We are dual citizens: of earth (USA) and citizens of heaven. Patriotism can be a good thing—I think it is good here where we have a constitution that restricts tyranny and upholds laws and liberties. I love my country. But I am first a citizen of heaven and my King is Christ. He is the King of kings.

Examples: Some of you identify as Republicans some as Democrats. It pains me to witness the great division we have today—even among Christians. Some of you think being a republican is the equivalent to being a Christian. It’s not. Some of you think being a democrat is being a Christian. Again, no! As Tony Evans said, Jesus doesn’t ride on the back of an elephant or a donkey. I’ve had various people ask me to weigh in on certain elections or get involved politically. I will not do it. We serve a higher party than that. Human politics is important and I hope some of you get involved and even run for office. But quite frankly I hate to see pastors become political partisans and churches to become political activist groups. It cheapens the mission of Christ. Politicians will come and go and be forgotten, parties will come and go... Even nations will come and go, but God’s will and word and kingdom will never end. History is HIS-story. The Christian says, “I choose to be for him. Where a political party, candidate, or election matches his purpose and his will, you will find me.”

This doesn’t mean being unengaged. There are issues that we must stand on.

Today is Sanctity of human life day. Abortion is a huge example of an issue that Christians cannot waiver on. Jer 1:5 tells us that God knows us before He forms us in the womb. Ps 139:13-16 speaks of God’s active role in our creation and formation in the womb. Ex 21:22-25 prescribes the same penalty for someone who causes the death of a baby in the womb as for someone who commits murder—death. God considers a baby in the womb to be as human as an adult. For the Christian, abortion is not a matter of a woman’s right to choose. It is a matter of the life or death of a person made in God’s image. Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6. At the same time, we must offer grace to those who have. Monday is MLK day. Nonviolent activism and racial equality. Two ideas born out of a biblical worldview.

So what?
1. **Develop a biblical worldview and think Christianly.** How do you do that? Read your Bible. Meditate on what it means. Practice what it says. Think of all the social media you read, all the TV you watch, all the stuff of the world you fill your mind with. By comparison, how much of God’s word goes in? This is a choice we must make—harder than any other generation before us! We will never think Christianly until we fill our mind with God’s word. Remember what God said to Joshua? Do not let this book of the law...

2. **Be Christlike.** You will not influence people by being arrogant, belligerent, or argumentative. Act like his Spirit lives in you. Gal.5:22-23

3. **Stand strong, even if you are all alone.** In your heart don’t waiver. **You are not alone** if you’re on God’s side. Eventually, God wins. And you will have no regrets if you’re on his side. 1Cor. 15: 57-58 *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* 58 *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

The God of Angel Armies is by your side.