

The Captain of the Lord's Host

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Date: 25 February 2021

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

- [0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship this evening with a singing in Gaelic of the words of Psalm 65 from the beginning of the psalm. Psalm 65.
- Praise waits for thee in Zion, Lord, to thee vows paid shall be. O thou that hear art of prayer, all flesh shall come to thee.
- Iniquities, I must confess, prevail against me do. But as for our transgressions, then purge away shalt thou. Blessed is the man whom thou dost choose, and makest approach to thee, that he within thy courts, O Lord, may still a dweller be.
- We surely shall be satisfied with thy abundant grace, and with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy place.
- And so on. Ha annan siyon fehevarsht, ma'lach u ye gunti. Ha annan siyon fehevarsht, ma'lach u ye gunti.
- [1 : 41] Ha annan siyon fehevarsht, ma'lach u ye gunti.
- O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti.
- O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti.
- O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. O ye gunti. Thank you.
- Thank you.
- [3 : 44] Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- [6 : 14] Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- And that you are willing to receive even the most gross sinner upon a confession of sin.
- [11 : 30] We begin with our homes, our families, our neighbourhoods. We pray for our community. We pray for our community. We pray for our people.
- We pray for our people. We pray for our people. We pray for our people. We pray for our people. We pray for our people.
- We pray for our people. We pray for our people. We pray for our people. We pray for our people.
- We pray for our people. We pray for our people. in their minds, in their souls. Remember their homes and families and any who may be burdened for them.

We pray for those who care for them, nurses and doctors, whose role it is to deliver care to them. We are in the middle of a pandemic as we so often bring to your attention and that is clearly a burden that we may have and we ask that you would aid the recovery of those who have succumbed to that virus and remember those who are entrusted with caring for such.

[12 : 50] We pray for our local hospital, the care homes, we pray for Bethesda, remembering all who in their weakness and the frailty of old age are looking to others to minister to them.

We give thanks for the way that you can deliver temporal mercies and at the same time that you can accompany that with spiritual blessings, opening the eyes of the understanding to the truth that you are the God who is God over all, who provides for all our needs in this world.

We remember before you those who govern us. We pray for the various parliaments, for Westminster the Prime Minister, for the Scottish Parliament and the First Minister.

We pray for our local government, those who are in office there, their councillors and the various roles they occupy. We pray that you would guide them when affairs are committed to their care that are onerous and vexatious because of the current demands that are placed upon them.

We remember those who serve the community. We pray for our police officers, our ambulance drivers and paramedics. We pray for our firemen. We pray for all ancillary services who have a role to play in keeping our community active and safe.

[14 : 42] We remember those, whoever they may be, whether they are at, on sea or on land. And in the air we remember them all to you and ask that you would watch over us, each one, thankful that you are the God who doesn't slumber nor sleep.

Your eyes are ever upon the children of men. We bless you and thank you that your people in particular are your special people.

You are the apple of your eye. We are the apple of your eye. And we bless you and thank you that no matter how many enemies abound, they are your chosen people.

And you have a care for them that will deflect the arrows of the enemies.

We pray that you would remember all that is done in your name, in our midst and to the far corners of the earth. May the gospel of your grace have free caution amongst us.

[15 : 59] We be blessed that the seed sown would yield fruit. We are thankful that you have ordained all things and whatsoever comes to pass, you are responsible for it.

There are many mysteries in our lives, many mysteries in the history of this world that cannot be unraveled. But the day will come when all will be made plain.

But at the end of it all, you are sovereign and you sit on the throne of this universe. All that takes place within the realm of the sphere of your influence will be seen for what it is.

So watch over as we pray, blessing all who believe in your care, seeking mercy for our many sins. In Christ the Redeemer's name we would ask it. Amen.

We are going to hear God's word as we have it in the Old Testament Scriptures. And we are reading from the book of Joshua. We are going to read chapter 5. Joshua chapter 5.

[17 : 16] And it came to pass when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, and their heart melted.

Neither was their spirit in them any more because of the children of Israel. At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel a second time.

And Joshua made him sharp knives and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise.

All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt.

Now all the people that came out were circumcised. But all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised.

[18 : 33] For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord.

And to whom the Lord swore that he would not show them the land, which the Lord swore unto their fathers, that he would give us a land that floweth with milk and honey.

And their children whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised, for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way. And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp till they were whole.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.

And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month, and even in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow, after the Passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn in the selfsame day.

[19 : 49] And the manna ceased on the morrow, after they had eaten of the old corn of the land. Neither had the children of Israel manna any more, but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Cain and that here.

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.

And Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord, am I now come.

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship. And said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoes from off thy foot.

For the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so. Amen. And so on.

[20 : 53] And may the Lord at his blessing to this reading of his word, and to his name be the praise. I guess to turn for a short while to the words we have from verse 13 to the end of the chapter.

It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him, with his sword drawn in his hand.

And Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our enemies? Many suggest that the main theme of the book of Joshua is that God keeps his promises.

One reason given is that it begins with the realization of a promise given to Abraham.

He said unto thee, in Genesis, I will make of thee a great nation. I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing.

[22 : 14] He adds to these words in chapter 15 of Genesis. In the same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

It was as good as done, because God said it. So the opening verses of the book make reference to that.

Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses, my servant is dead.

Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, and to the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

The place of God's promise is so prevalent throughout the book, that the penultimate chapter again, the reference is made as Joshua prepares to demit his earthly office.

[23 : 45] And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you.

All are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. No doubt you could argue this is what emboldens the servant of God many is an occasion.

If he had grasped the truth of God's word, then it seems that he was indeed a man of God who was familiar with the promises of God.

He bolstered himself and encouraged himself with the word of the Lord. He had proved himself a brave and a loyal soldier.

And during his time, Moses placed his mantle upon him. And we are told from the scripture that Joshua was identified by another name, Hosea, when he and Caleb went to spy out the land.

[25 : 14] It was Moses who called him by the name Joshua, which literally means the Lord is salvation. The theologian Gerard von Groningen emphasized the significance of this renaming.

It is the Lord who goes before his people, destroys the nations and makes Israel's inheritance of the promised land a reality.

Joshua, however, will go before the Israelites as their head. The man commanding, directing and leading is a servant. His name should always remind him and the other leaders, the people and the surrounding nations, that it is not the man himself, but whom the man represents and serves, who is the conqueror, deliverer and rest giver.

And this is important for us to remember. There is no doubt in the significant place Joshua has in the salvation history of the people of God.

But he personally does not lose sight of what that place is. Yes, there were occasions when he was in close proximity to Moses.

[26 : 32] And with Moses, he was in close proximity to the Lord. Prior to leaving the scene of time on the top of Mount Nebo, Moses gave Joshua instruction, confirmed by the Lord on the tent of meeting.

So having crossed the Jordan, an event witnessed by the people of the region, inspiring fear in their hearts, the city of Jericho is only a few miles away.

But it is a city that is well garrisoned. And God, rather than allow the people to rush into battle, calls for a rededication of his covenant nation.

And we read from the beginning of the chapter of the resurrection of the resurrection of the manna, as well as the keeping of the Passover on the 14th day of the month.

This also marked the end of the heavenly provision of the manna for the simple reason that the promised land was able to supply them with the fruit of the land.

[27 : 39] A provision that lasted all of the duration of their wilderness journey. So when we turn to these words that we are considering, we are not told why Joshua was where he was.

There are various suggestions that are made by various preachers and teachers. For example, we cannot say of them that they are anything but speculation because the scripture is silent.

But G.B. Duncan, just to give you an illustration, suggests that Joshua went to do some reconnaissance. And he wanted to take a look at the city of Jericho.

And as he put it, he found himself looking at Jesus. Others say that he was with his head bowed in prayer. He had gone to be apart from the people and he was engaged in prayer.

And when he lifted up his head, there stood a man with a drawn sword. It seems mysterious how the likes of Joshua could be caught unaware when he was so skilled in the art of war himself.

[29 : 08] So elect anyway for that purpose. But we learn something about the caliber of man that he was. Because he is fearless in the face of what was possible, possibly an enemy.

But he challenges him as to who he was. Now most are of the opinion that what we have here is an encounter with God.

What is called a theophany or more accurately a Christophany. An appearance of the Lord Jesus as the angel of the Lord.

Clothed with the garb of humanity, possibly. Several examples spring to mind from the scripture.

Where we have such encounters recorded. Hagar was met by the angel of the Lord in Genesis 16 and 21.

[30 : 22] Abraham also and Jacob and Moses and Gideon and Balaam. All had encounters with an angel or the angel of the Lord.

And we know that God spoke from the midst of the burning bush. And we know that he spoke out of the cloud of fire and smoke on Mount Sinai.

Some of these descriptions are the passion of God himself speaking. Others, it is the passion of the Lord Jesus.

But because it is before his incarnation, before he was born of a woman into the world, it is a theophany or a Christophany.

Appearances such as these are described by a theologian of a past generation as Christ trying on the suit of our humanity.

[31 : 30] But two or three things convince us that it was such a theophany. First of all, we find that he gives himself a divine title.

The captain of the host of the Lord. If you read on into the sixth chapter and the second verse, we find there that it is the Lord that is said that speaks to Joshua.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given unto thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of Valar.

And the third thing that we have that should also prove a positive indication that Joshua is aware that the person before him is divine is that he worships him.

Joshua fell on his face to the earth and did worship. And when an angel speaks to the people of God, they often forbid an act of worship because they are but fellow creatures.

[32 : 52] But this was not the case at this time. Now the second thing that is of interest to us here is the effect that it had upon Joshua.

As we said, he fell on his face in worship. And I think we should take note of this often repeated reaction. Each person privileged to meet God in this way reacts similarly.

Abraham, Jacob, Daniel have a similar reaction. Daniel stated that righteousness belongs to God, but to us the shamefacedness of those who are sinners.

Thomas Brooks the Puritan maintains that it is only holy souls that are taken and affected with his holiness. The more holy they are, the more affected they are by an appearance of that holiness.

To the holy angels, the holiness of God is the sparkling diamond, he says, in the ring of glory.

[34 : 26] It seems to be quite contrary to what you would expect the experience to be. You would expect an unholy person to be more affected by the holiness of God.

But when a person is himself or herself a person of faith and a person of understanding, who has an appreciation of what holiness is, their own personal holiness seems an irrelevance.

And they are more convinced than anything of the true holiness of God. We may think that what we are reading here in the book of Joshua is unique to the Old Testament.

We know that their experiences are more obvious and that there are more of them in a sense.

We know that the prophet Isaiah, at the beginning, when we read of the encounter of the prophet in the temple, when we read there of the presence of God impressing itself on the prophet.

[36 : 09] The glory of the Lord filled the temple with it. And the effect upon him was, O is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And so on. And so on. Words that we may be familiar with.

But we know that Peter, the apostle, when he was face to face with the Lord Jesus, and he glimpsed the glory of Christ.

The utterance that came from his mouth was, Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinner. We know that the centurion, when he came to speak to the Lord and seek the Lord's help, he again made this confession, having discovered the might and the power of the Lord Jesus.

He saw his unworthiness for him to come under his roof. It has to be noticed that rather than discovering such an attitude of worship, it is reinforced.

[37 : 48] It is, when we read here, we, he fell on his face to the earth and did worship.

the Lord. The Lord. And he fell on his head and gave his name to the Father. And, uh, prostrates himself, as it were. Charles Price reckons there is significance in the shoes, God filling them whenever they go.

We know that Moses had the same desire to take the shoes from off his feet. It's not clear what this means, but I think to read too much into it may be a feeling on our part.

But wherever God is, and wherever we're aware of the presence of God in that place, the feeling that we have is that we are not worthy to be where that God is.

The ground upon which we stand, if God is standing on it, and we are within the orbit of it, the circumference of it, we feel that we are unworthy to be there.

[39 : 16] And that is something that we need to remember. This passion chosen by God to be a leader to his people, endowed with many gifts and graces, given many experiences of God's goodness and God's blessing upon his own labors.

Yet there is not a sense in which he possesses an unholy boldness, something that God despises.

There are occasions when we feel ourselves emboldened, but only in a sense where our worship is a worship that conforms to our understanding of who God is.

Praise waits for thee in Zion, Lord. That is what the psalmist says. He says it of the psalmist.

He says it of the Lord's people. He says it of those who have a desire to come into his presence with praise.

[40 : 42] And when that is fulfilled in their experience, then there is no question in their mind that they are in the right place and that they are calling upon God as the God who is holy.

It brings confession from their lips. It brings their transgressions to mind. It brings the iniquity that marks them out.

But it brings them to their knees before a God who is able to deal with them. The captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoes from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy.

And Joshua did so. Charles Price, amongst others, suggests that this had to do with the journey that he was on.

And that God was saying something to him about that journey, which he could not pursue without God's help. But maybe it's more simple than that.

[42 : 09] A reminder to us of the God who is holy, even the thrice holy God, before whom the very angels of heaven veil their faces.

A unique encounter, but an encounter with a God who is like no other.

And no matter who comes into his presence and who experience an encounter with him, a revelation of his glory. They cannot but bow their heads to the dust.

We pray that God would remind us of the fact that he is such a God and that there is none like him. May he bless to us this word.

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that we are dust. We belong to the dust. You took us from the dust. To the dust we will return. And as we prostrate ourselves in the dust in your presence, help us to have a view of that glory that is uniquely yours as the alone saviour of sinners.

[43 : 22] Bestow upon us mercy. Guide us in the truth. Go before us in all we seek to do. We ask all with forgiveness of sin in Christ.

Now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all now and always. Amen.