

Let's Take Off Our Shoes

Something remarkable happened to a man named Joshua outside a city called Jericho. What happened to him needs to happen to us.

He became the leader of the Israelites after Moses died. In Joshua 1:3, God promised Joshua that when he led the people across the Jordan River that He would give him every place he set his foot. Three days later, God dried up the Jordan for His people to cross over. All of the Amorite kings and Canaanite kings heard how God was leading His people, and they just folded. They didn't have the courage to face them. Everything was going great until they came to Jericho and literally hit a wall.

Jericho was strong and fortified with huge walls all around the city. Joshua had a promise from God that the land was theirs, but the people of Jericho were not going to just hand it over. They chose to stand their ground inside what they believed was an impenetrable fortress.

Here's what happened to Joshua that changed everything:

"Now when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him. In His hand was His drawn sword. Joshua went to Him and said, 'Are You for us or for our enemies?'

"He said, 'Neither, for I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.' Then Joshua fell with his face to the ground and worshipped. Then he said, 'What does my Lord wish to say to His servant?'

"The commander of the army of the Lord said to Joshua, 'Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.' So Joshua did this" (Josh. 5:13-15).

It was right after this that God gave Joshua the plan to defeat Jericho. The people were to march around the city—one lap a day for six days. On the seventh day, they would march seven laps with the priests blowing on rams' horn trumpets. At the end of the seventh lap, they would blow a long blast on the trumpets, which would be everyone's cue to shout. Then the walls of Jericho would collapse.

That was some plan! It made no sense from a military perspective. But it was God's plan, and Joshua knew it.

Joshua literally removed his shoes that day. He was barefoot. This said volumes about his understanding not only of who God is but also of who God was to him. By removing his shoes, Joshua was saying, *"If this battle is going to be won, it will not be determined by our military equipment, as good as it may be. It will not be determined by our military strategy and expertise, as smart as we may be. If this battle is going to be won, it will not be determined by our strength, our endurance or our numbers. If this battle is going to be won, it will be won by God's power! His strength! His Spirit!"*

We need to take off our shoes. It's only then that we can see things from God's perspective and recognize His plans. It's about dying to yourself. It's about relinquishing control and accepting the fact that you are not God and you never will be. Taking off your shoes is about tuning in to God's voice. It's about humility and vulnerability before God and before others.

Sometimes all our successes can keep us from being really successful in things that matter the most. We can be too smart for our own good. When we hit a wall and the circumstances of life get dark, instead of taking off our shoes, we lace them up even tighter and try to kick our way through it. But the walls are too thick and too tall. We end up experiencing and inflicting more pain. We need to take off our shoes.

When Joshua saw this man with a sword in his hands, his heart

must have been beating out of his chest. He immediately asked him to identify himself: *"Are you for us or our enemies?"* Identify yourself! Whose side are you on?

The man replied, *"Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."*

When Joshua heard that, he hit the deck. The Scripture says he fell down *"in reverence"* and immediately asked, *"What message does my Lord have for his servant?"*

There are several things about this event that indicate this man was not an angel. If he had been an angel, he would have told Joshua to get up and not to worship him because he was just an angel. Most Bible scholars believe this man was Jesus. The Bible teaches us that Jesus has always been. John 1:1-2 says, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."*

"The Word" is a name for Jesus. John 1:14 says that one day *"The Word became flesh ..."* That's the Jesus we know in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But Jesus has always been. I believe that Joshua got a sneak preview of Jesus.

The reason Jericho fell before Joshua is because Joshua fell before Jesus. It's really not important whether you believe that the man standing in front of Joshua that day was actually Jesus. Don't get distracted by that. The point is that Joshua's perspective of who God is and his understanding of God's authority is why he recognized that this moment required total surrender and submission to his Lord. He automatically said, *"What message does my Lord have for his servant?"* That's where we need to be and what we need to ask.

Take off your shoes and fall before Jesus. It will clarify God's purpose for your life and define who you are.

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