New Hope Sermon The Divine Encounter Joshua 5: 13-15

Introduction:
Today’s story is about an encounter Joshua had with the Divine Commander of the army of the Lord. To set the stage, I was trying to think of a time when I came face to face with a person of great authority and needed to do what he said – full stop. I thought of our going to the ambassador of Ecuador before a mission trip there, and following his instructions for entry into his country. But that wasn’t strong enough. Then I found this true story. It’s called Obeying Our Commanding Officer:

“My friend’s father, an Army sergeant, tried for 25 years to quit smoking. After multiple failed attempts, he went in for his yearly medical exam with an Army doctor. The physician told him that his health was being severely harmed by smoking and that he should stop. The sergeant confessed he knew he should stop and, in a tone of despair, related his multiple attempts to stop smoking over many years.

The physician looked at him and said, "What are these two bars on my lapel?"
The sergeant replied, "They mean you are a captain."
"Yes," said the captain, "And they also mean I outrank you, and I am giving you a direct order to stop smoking."

My friend’s father went home and never smoked another cigarette. He could not quit on his own, even after years of trying, but he could quit when he understood the power of a direct order from a superior officer. He was thoroughly indoctrinated by the United States Army and not willing to violate an order.

Let’s read our scripture together: Joshua 5:13-15 in KJV. Pray
NLT has a few different words in v. 14 and 15 that I really appreciate in this translation. Listen to it in NLT:

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.” (NIV)

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?”

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 as he was told. NLT

“And Joshua said, “What do you want your servant to do?...

And Joshua did what was told.”

As believers in Christ, our Commander-in-Chief the Lord Jesus has given us many commands in the New Testament. When we take them as seriously as this sergeant took his order to quit smoking, we'll be surprised how God can transform our lives. Preaching Today.com David Gibson, Idaho Falls, Idaho. This is the theme we will consider together:

• What happens to us when we meet the Lord in a divine encounter?
• If God gives us directions, which He is sure to do, how will we respond?
• Our obedience will keep coming back to the difference between sight and faith.

I invite you to have this scripture story open in your Bible in front of you so you can think through what happened in the Joshua encounter.

First, approaching the facts of the story with the eyes of sight: Joshua saw a man in front of him with a drawn sword. His sword was not sheathed so apparently he had not come as a civilian on a peace-keeping mission. He was ready for battle. He was a military man.
Now that would be potentially troublesome for Joshua because of 4 aspects of Joshua’s actual situation. 1. The Israelites had just landed in enemy territory and created camp outside one of the walled cities. 2. They were still healing from the circumcision of every male in the camp – so they were not fully battle-ready. 3. They were at the edge of a great walled city Jericho which looked invulnerable. 4. And they had conquered nothing yet in this promised land. So God’s promises were not yet fulfilled – that the land would be theirs.

From a human perspective, all these vulnerabilities were like red flags waving danger – warning – vulnerability. Watch out.

This is so often how we interpret or “see” our situation, isn’t it? We are reasonable, logical people and when we see the problems, or the dangers, our amygdala can kick in through fear and we wonder if it’s matter of fight or flight! Humanly, the “what-ifs” often take center stage. So how can we learn to walk by faith and not by sight? First, we look to God for the courage to go beyond what we can see with our eyes. And we ask God to help us go beyond the realm of our feelings and emotions so we can see with God’s eyes.

How might Joshua have done that – looking at the same scenario with the eyes of faith?
1. He would need to remember – He and the people had just experienced a miracle as God backed up the Jordan so they could cross over. If he looked around he could see those memorial stones God had the leaders of each tribe take up from the Jordan. The miracle was real.
2. God had been in direct communication with Joshua – before they crossed the Jordan and presumably for many years before that. Every time Moses went to talk to the Lord face to face at the tent of meeting, Joshua would stay behind in the tent after Moses left. I expect he learned to know God there.
3. God had also talked to Joshua through Moses and Moses’ exhortation to him not to be afraid but to lead the people into the promised land. He had been commissioned in the sight of God and Moses and the people for his job. And now it was beginning.
4. God had promised to be with him (Josh.1:5) and to give him every place he set his feet (Jos. 1:3-4).
5. AND God had promised that no one would be able to stand against him all the days of his life (Josh.1:5).
This is what faith does. It takes God’s perspective and sees the long view – both from the past and into the future. Like looking out over those mountain ranges.
Naturally, Joshua needed to figure out who this armed man in front of him was, however, so he asked: “Are you for us or for them?”. ‘Neither.’ said the warrior. ‘I have come as the commander of the army of the Lord. Take off your shoes for you are on holy ground. And Joshua did as he was told. Josh.5:13-15. Joshua went face down before this commander of the Lord. It reminded me of Matt Redman’s album and lead song: Face down. “Welcomed into the courts of the King I’ve been ushered in to Your presence. Lord I stand on Your merciful ground and with every step tread with reverence. And I fall face down as your glory shines around. Yes I fall face down as your glory shines around.”

Joshua experienced the holiness of God in this encounter and it set the stage for all that would follow in the Promised Land. The Divine Encounter. This is what I believe God wants to do in our lives, beloved. He wants to meet us so our relationship with him is never just ho-hum, same-old, same-old. He wants to radically get us off our own ways of doing things and onto His agenda.

Are you longing for that kind of encounter with God? Are you thirsty for Him – more of Him? Really thirsty? Jesus said blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Mt.5:6. Hunger and thirst. Seeking such an intimate relationship with God that we can be sure of His agenda and get with His program. Sometimes that Divine Encounter happens because we have that longing. Other times it happens because God is seeking this kind of relationship and meets us. That’s what God did with both Moses and Isaiah.

In Moses’ encounter with God, God initiated that conversation. Moses was also told to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. But what do we learn about God in that encounter? We learn of God’s holiness. We learn of God’s compassion. I have compassion on my people says the Lord in their slavery and I have come to deliver them. Exod. 3: We learn of God’s power to deliver. We learn of God’s calling. We learn that God has an agenda of redemption and restoration and salvation. And he uses us to get that message out to others. God took the initiative and gave Aaron to Moses as a companion to help Moses fulfill God’s agenda. God encountered Moses and Moses went on God’s mission with God’s calling and God’s power and Aaron’s help.

Isaiah encountered God in the temple. He saw the Lord high and lifted up and his glory filled the temple. Notice what we learn about God in that encounter. Read Isa. 6:1-4. The temple is filled with God’s glory – there is smoke, there are angels proclaiming the holiness of God, the temple foundations shake. God comes with great power and majesty. It must have been an overwhelming experience. And Isaiah felt completely undone – no ho hum religion here. No comfortable religiosity here. But God did something about that. An angel took a burning coal or the altar and touched – singed – Isaiah’s lips and God told him your sin is atoned for. At great cost to Isaiah. Atoned for, beloved. That foreshadowed what Jesus did centuries later – at the cost of his violent sacrificial
death. Atoned for. Isaiah could now be at-one with God and able to hear what God had to say. He was stripped or cleansed from his own agenda. And he not only heard the voice of God say “Whom shall I send and who will go for us, but he could answer: Here am I send me. And God did.

Encounters with God. Moses. Isaiah, Joshua. So, returning to Joshua’s encounter, let me ask the question: Why do you think the divine commander came to Joshua at this time in his leadership? Because, I believe, Joshua needed to get the right instructions from the top. He was just beginning the conquest of the Promised Land. He was a military man himself and undoubtedly had drawn up all kinds of elaborate plans for how to take each city. But his own battle experience was not what would matter here. God had promised to help Joshua conquer the Promised Land – God’s way and so he needed to follow God’s mandates. It was the only way for victory. Joshua needed to hear and obey exactly what God said, and most of the time He did.

Just from a human perspective there is no way Joshua would have come up with the 7 day walk around Jericho with the priests blowing the victory rams horns and the people silent day after day as they all marched around the city. They were sitting ducks and could have been killed by the hundreds by the flaming arrows and weaponry the people of Jericho could have hurled down on them. I think the divine commander gave Joshua those battle plans in that divine encounter. God’s battle plans. God’s kingdom agenda. And when Joshua obeyed, the city fell, as God promised.

So let’s apply this story in our own lives.
Two illustrations bring this idea of hearing God and obeying God’s voice to our lives today.

First, obeying God isn’t always easy. John Ortberg tells this story on himself:
Nancy and I were in a part of the country we had never been before. We were going to be driving on obscure back roads, so we got a rental car, and the guy at the counter said to me, "Along with this car, if you want, you can also get a GPS system." Have you ever used a GPS system? You plug it in and punch in your destination. A woman's voice will tell you how to get wherever it is you are going. Well, when the guy at the counter asked if I wanted one, my immediate response was, "No. That is going to cost something. I don't need that. I can find where I'm going without that." Anybody want to guess what my wife weighed in with? "Get the GPS." So, we got the GPS.

Here's the deal: You can get the box. You can have the lady in the car, but that doesn't mean you trust her. If you trust her, what do you do? You do what she says. You go where she tells you to go. She says, "Turn left," you turn left.

...At one point when we were driving in this car, I was quite sure the lady was wrong. She said to go left, and I didn't go left. I went right, because I knew she was wrong. Then as an interesting response, she said, "Recalculating route. When safe to do so, execute a U-turn." I knew she was wrong, so I unplugged her. That's the beauty of that little box. You can unplug her. I got lost as a goose. My wife enjoyed that immensely.

So we plugged that lady back in, and you know what she said?...She said, "You think I'm going to help you now? You rejected me. You just find your way home by yourself." No—she didn't say that. She said, "Recalculating route. When safe to do so, execute a U-turn."

Now see, that's grace. As soon as you're ready to listen, as soon as you're ready to surrender, God will say, "Execute a U-turn." That's repentance. "I'll bring you home." That is grace. That's Jesus. He is the only one with authoritative wisdom about how to live...Jesus does not present himself as a good, spiritual teacher to be admired from a distance. He presents himself as Master, as Lord, as the one to be followed and served and obeyed and worshiped. There is no other way. He is it. John Ortberg, obeying your GPS system in his sermon "Choices," www.preachingtoday.com

In Illustration #2. One father writes, “A number of years ago, our family was in the Dominican Republic on a mission trip. If you've ever driven in a developing country, you know how dangerous
the traffic can be. Vehicles whiz past, coming within just a few feet of children playing close to the road. One night, my son Sam was playing a game in his own little world, in which he would zig and zag, back and forth from sidewalk onto the narrow street and back. It wasn't a heavily travelled road; but there was always loud music blaring, and it was pitch dark. From about 10 feet away, I suddenly shouted, "Samuel, don't move!"

Immediately he froze. About a second later a Moped zipped past him, going 30 mph with no lights on—right where Sam was about to step. My 6-year-old didn't ignore me, argue, or blatantly disobey. I said freeze, and he froze. That obedience probably saved his life.

Dave Stone, "Teaching Respect Within the Home," Preaching (July/August 2012)

God initiated the divine encounter with Joshua and Joshua said: “I am at your command,” “What do you want your servant to do?” 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 as he was told. NLT

Obeying the voice and call of God involves humbly joining God in what God wants to do as a living sacrifice. Philippians 2:13 says He can give us the power and the will to do that. Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson  2/21/16

This image of being on holy ground and responding to God’s call brings us to Holy Communion. The staff of the church were talking and it seems good to us (and we think the Lord) that we have Holy Communion each week as a way to repeatedly be in a position to be touched by the love of Christ. Jesus’ calling as Messiah was to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn and to give a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair Isa. 61;1-3. I believe we can experience that part of His calling week by week in communion as we are healed by His blood, restored in our own lives and empowered by the touch of the Spirit to go out to serve others. So, to prepare for Holy Communion today, we will sing the song: Holy Ground.