God is not with you in this fight

What a strange title. I know what you are thinking. Why would he write that? What would possess him to say such a thing? Doesn't He know that my cause is just? Doesn't He know that I fight for God Himself? Why would God not be with me? Let's begin with a story.

When Israel first started to take the Promised Land on God's orders, they had a formidable foe in the way: the city of Jericho. Jericho was a massive walled city. It looked impregnable. Many foes had tried and failed to conquer this city. It didn't look like the Israelites had a chance. They were a ragtag band of nomads. The Israelites had a secret weapon though. God was on their side. Joshua sought God for wisdom and God told Joshua to undertake a very unusual strategy. March around the city once a day for six days playing trumpets with the Ark of the Covenant ahead of them. On the seventh day march around it seven times. Joshua had the people do exactly as God commanded and after the seventh time the walls of Jericho crumbled and the city was taken by the Israelites. If you stop following the story here, you'll be tempted to get all proud and talk about how your God always has your back. He provides a way to accomplish the impossible when you are working toward His goals. And you would be right. But there is an important caveat here. One that the Israelites learned in the very next battle.

The next city on the way was the city of Ai. Ai was small and nothing like the city of Jericho. Sure of themselves and their God's assistance, the Israelites attacked the city and experienced an overwhelming defeat. What was it about Ai that was different? The goal of taking the promised land was still a Godly command. Ai was a worthy target. The reason the Israelites lost was because there was sin in the camp. God's response to Joshua when he went before him to find out what had gone wrong was telling. "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings." – Joshua 7:10.

The victory over Jericho was not conventional nor what most would call wise, but it was fought God's way. The fight for Ai was conventional and fought the way most wise generals would. The contrast in results here is telling. God's command to Israel for the battle of Jericho was to take no idols from the city. But there were some among Israel who did just that. They weren't fighting the battle God's way, so God abandoned them in the battle for Ai and left them to a humiliating defeat.

Assuming that because our end goal aligns with God's He will join us in the fight would be a mistake. Likewise, assuming that because we won the last battle He will be with us in the next is also a mistake. The stories of Jericho and Ai illustrate why this is dangerous. With God, the strategy is as important as the goal. He is not with you in the battle unless you are fighting His way. Or put another way: our job is not to win, our job is to be obedient. We can safely leave the rest of it up to God.

God has not been with us in our Politics

I wanted to write about this because I think it is especially applicable for evangelicals and political activism. We have many laudable and godly goals with our political activism. But we have fallen into the same trap that the Israelites did. We were so focused on winning for God we stopped fighting God's way. We made ungodly alliances with ungodly politicians. We compromised God's law in the name of short term political gains. Eventually this culminated in God's name being used in vain on national television by the very people who claimed to follow Him. We suffered more harm politically in those years than I think we have ever experienced before. The final days of Trump's presidency were our humiliating defeat at Ai.

Thankfully, Ai didn't stay a humiliating defeat for Israel. They purged the sin from the camp and refocused on obedience. They defeated Ai God's way and experienced success. I don't know what

victories God has planned for His church in the US. But I do know that we will not experience that victory unless we can let go of the idea that we have to vote for a candidate who we imagine being the lesser of two evils when there are far more acceptable third party candidates to choose from, unless we can abandon the idea that we need to engage in political calculus and fight dirty to win. If you don't escape the belief that you must win then God will not be with you in this fight.

I'm not saying that good strategy plays no part in our decision-making and political alignment. I am saying that when "good" strategy leads us to be disobedient then we must abandon the strategy and stick with obedience. This is a matter of faith. If you have real faith then you will trust in God to bless your obedience and leave the outcome in His hands win or lose. That is all that God requires of us.

Voting for a candidate that you know is a liar and a bully, a candidate that you know to be incompetent, a candidate who overreaches their authority repeatedly is voting for a candidate God would not approve of. I have spoken to many people who "held their nose and voted for Trump". They knew he was a bad candidate but thought that if they didn't vote for him then a worse candidate would win. The result of that kind of voting-bloc choice was instrumental in Trump winning the election. Trump was a President who:

- Lied repeatedly throughout his time in office.
- Surrounded himself with yes men.
- Could not take criticism.
- Proved incapable of handling a medical crisis.
- Promoted dangerous conspiracy theories.

Even his "victories" were tarnished. The allegations against Brett Kavanaugh were far too believable for me to be comfortable with him as a Judge. The "Wall" was a farce for the entire presidency. I'm very ambivalent about the changes in our stance with Israel and the impact it has on Palestinians. The engagement with North Korea was an embarrassment and both Russia and China have gained more influence under Trump than any other President I can think of.

This all ended in the events of Jan 6th where Trump threw a giant tantrum before a crowd of people waving flags with Jesus' name prominently displayed. Those people, believing that Trump was asking them to, mobbed the Capitol building hunting for duly elected officers of the republic to do them harm.

I think there is a more Godly way for Christians to approach politics than we have been. I would like you to imagine for a moment what can happen when every Christian refuses to hold their nose and vote for a candidate. The metaphorical chains that political parties hold over us are loosened. They can no longer count on "the evangelical" or the "black church" vote. It will no longer be enough to be the least bad option to win our support. They'll have to start actually delivering not just on policy but also on character. We have been held hostage by various parties in America far too long. It's time to exercise the freedom we have in Christ. Imagine how the political landscape could change then. Are we fighting the battle of Jericho or the battle of Ai in our politics? Will God perform a miracle in the battle we fight? Or will He abandon us to our own strategies and their consequences? The answer is found in our obedience.