

Preparation for Conquest 12-01-02

Joshua 5:1-13

We are back in Joshua, starting with chapter 5: *1 Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.* (Josh 5:1 (NIV))

When God parts your Jordan, that obstacle that is keeping you from God's will for your life, then people take notice. Man hates the miraculous. That is because it proves God intervenes in the affairs of men, and most people would prefer to believe that such a thing does not happen. First, it proves there is a God that is involved in the lives of men, and secondly it means we are accountable to our Creator. Third, it implies that if I am opposed to the people of God, I'm about to lose. When you are faced with an inexplicable miracle, you either repent and change your ways, or you harden your heart and prepare to lose. Unfortunately, the Amorite and Canaanite kings did the latter.

Your testimony is one of your most powerful witnessing tools you have. How can someone deny your experience? Many of us have a hard time sharing Christ with people. Personally, I never walk up to someone and ask, "Do you know Jesus?" I wait for the leading of the Holy Spirit and an opening in the conversation. Many times the conversation turns to life's experiences. That is your opportunity to relay to them in real life terms what brought you to a living relationship with Christ, to tell your story of the Jordan parting. That is the miracle that causes people's hearts to melt, just like the crossing of the Jordan affected the heathen kings. But be praying that the person you're sharing with will have a receptive response as opposed to the hard-hearted response these kings had.

Josh 5:2 (NIV) *2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again."*

It's interesting that God directed them to use flint. Recently scientists have been investigating ways to use flint surgically because it produces a finer edge than surgical steel. Circumcision was a ritual part of a covenant that God gave to Abraham to keep. God promised fruitfulness and land and a relationship with his descendents, but Abraham had a part to keep. His part was to circumcise all the males under his care, and to see that his descendents in the line of Isaac did the same. It was their part of the blood covenant. They did their part throughout the 400 years of Israel's sojourning in Egypt, but for some reason they had not done so in the wilderness. That ritual reminded them of the original promises of God to Abraham and his descendents. Here they are on the verge of it being fulfilled and the ritual is reminding them that God is keeping His promise. They are still in a covenant relationship with Him.

Josh 5:3-7 (NIV) *3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth. 4 Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt--all the men of military age--died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt. 5 All the*

people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not. 6 The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7 So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way.

As I read this passage I had to ask, "Why not? Why weren't the next generation circumcised?" They had been given the Law early on in their wilderness journey. It prescribed that every male be circumcised on their eighth day (Leviticus 12:3). Coincidentally, it has been discovered that a baby's blood coagulates best eight days after birth. Why did they not keep this new law they had just received from God? The answer isn't obvious at first, but as we look into God's word it becomes obvious.

Commented [Q1]: 3 On the eighth day the boy must be circumcised.
Lev 12:3 (NCV)

Circumcision itself was not what God was after. It was merely a picture of what God wanted from their hearts. He commanded them to not only circumcise the flesh, but also the heart. Deuteronomy 10:16 (NIV) *16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.* Please notice that this is an action that God is asking us to take. It is something we must do. It is the opposite of being stiff-necked. Stiff-necked means not turning our heads in to hear what God is telling us. It means going our own way and refusing to hear God's voice.

Not only were they asked to circumcise their own hearts, but they were to allow God to circumcise their hearts also. Deut 30:6 (NIV) *The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.* Their part of the covenant was to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. God was saying, "I'll do all these wonderful things for you, if you will do what is best for you – love Me with your all, and I will help you do that." No wonder Jesus could see this was the Great Commandment. It was the basis of the covenant, not the outward surgical procedure, but what it represented in the heart.

In the passage we just read, we see that the older generation had not obeyed the LORD. They went through the ritual of the covenant, but neglected the substance of the covenant. They wanted the Promised Land, and all the promises God gave to Abraham, but they never circumcised their hearts or allowed God to do that work in them. They witnessed miracle after miracle and repented time and time again, but still refused to obey God. Their bodies came out of Egypt, but their hearts remained there. The author of Hebrews says they were unbelievers (Hebrews 3:17-19). We are in danger of the same thing happening to us. We go through the ritual. We go to church. We put our 10% in the plate, but our heart is still in the world. We don't circumcise our hearts, nor do we allow the LORD to perform that surgery we so desperately need. We prefer insensitivity to the things of God. "After all, that won't cost me anything. That won't make me uncomfortable. I don't have to let go of my prejudices. Why would I want to cry for the lost, share with the needy, especially if

Commented [Q2]: 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.
Heb 3:17-19 (NIV)

no one will ever know or give me credit for it? What if they just take from me and I don't see the results? No, that kind of giving isn't safe." No, it isn't, but it is the kind of tenderness that is found in Jesus' heart toward the Father. That tenderness toward the Father said "yes" to the cross for your sake.

This circumcision of the heart, that we are to perform on ourselves, is a willingness to let Him live in me. It is to share the heart of God for others. It is taking off my old life and letting Him be my new life (Galatians 6:15). Listen to how Paul describes it in Colossians 2:11 (NIV). *11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,* He helps us take off our old nature, the one we inherited from Adam. It is bent toward evil and destruction, and I must let Christ help me take it off. In its place, I put on the life of Christ. His life is sensitive to God's will and ways.

Commented [Q3]: 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.
Gal 6:15 (NIV)

Now think back to why they weren't willing to circumcise the younger generation in the wilderness. If the older generation went through the outward ritual, and it didn't change their heart, perhaps they were reluctant to do the same with the younger generation. It didn't do them any good. They were just a poor testimony of how it shouldn't be. They had the outward marks without the inward change. Jeremiah 9:25 (NIV) *25 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh--* In other words, those who go through the motions, but don't have a heart change. They go through the routine of religion but act like the world. Maybe they were waiting till the hypocrisy was dealt with so the younger generation wouldn't follow in their footsteps. What does that say to us? We want to fill up our Sunday School but do we really want the children to be like us? It would be better that they didn't come if they are going to follow in our footsteps. Maybe God is waiting until we have all passed away to bring real revival. If they came now would they see ritual that represents a heart that is sensitive to God, or would they see ritual that doesn't match my life? I sing "I Surrender All" but my life says I only surrender to a Sunday morning routine. I sing "Spirit of the Living God fall fresh on me", but I constantly avoid the Holy Spirit's lead to lay down my life for others.

I have heard it said that the young people of today aren't impressed by much, but they are looking for something that is real. They want to know if our ritual is an expression of our heart or just a routine, a ceremony. Does it affect my daily life, or just my Sunday morning routine? I pray that we get real with God, so that the youth can see genuine hearts of worship when we come to church and every day of the week.

In this story we are reading, the younger generation was willing to do what the older generation refused to do. By faith they crossed the Jordan and took on the giants in the Promised Land. Then God said it was time to circumcise them, when it became a symbol of hearts truly surrendered to God.

Josh 5:8 (NIV) *8 And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.*

That left them vulnerable to attack by the enemy. Generations earlier, some of the sons of Jacob had tricked a town into accepting circumcision and then went in and killed them all (Genesis 34:25). They remembered their history, and now they had to be trusting in God to go through with the command. They did trust, and God protected them. It helped that the fear of God had come upon the enemy when they heard that they crossed the Jordan at flood stage. When you step out in faith into your Promised Land, God may ask you to do some things that will seem like you are placing yourself at risk. As long as you are obeying God, you can know He will watch over you. He has gone before you to prepare the way.

Commented [Q4]: 25 Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. Gen 34:25 (NIV)

This place of surrender and pain, when you have to rely totally on God, is called 'brokenness'. Obedience to God is seldom pain-free. It usually costs you. If doesn't, then it is not much of a sacrifice. Through brokenness we become more dependent upon God. We rely on Him more fully. It seems like a place of death, but in reality, it is a place of spiritual healing (Psalm 147:3). We turn to God with a greater desire to hear and obey than ever before.

Commented [Q5]: 3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalms 147:3 (NIV)

First we obey and follow God across our Jordan in faith. Then we cooperate with God in making our hearts more tender toward the Holy Spirit. We enter into a place of broken dependence upon God. It is from that place that we can let God heal us. There He reforms our attitudes and our habits, which is a part of our healing. Finally we are ready to let Him lead us into battle.

Josh 5:9 (NIV) *Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.* Finally Egypt is out of them! It had to die out with the old, just like the world in us must die with our old nature. Only the new life, the life that leaves the world behind and abandons itself to God can go on to conquer and possess the Promised Land.

I have a sense that there is a real need for us to come to Gilgal and circumcise our hearts that the reproach of the past might be rolled away. We need to repent of attitudes that have caused division. Some of you are new to Wayside and don't know what I'm referring to, but if you have been around the church long, you are familiar with the tendency of the church today to insist on minutia that divides. Division itself isn't always bad, but bitterness that often accompanies it is poison. We need to ask for forgiveness, we need to repent of attitudes of superiority. At the foot of the cross the ground is level. Rich, poor, intelligent, simple, influential, and laborers, we are all in desperate need of Jesus' cleansing blood. None of us can consider ourselves better than anyone else. We are all sinners saved by the grace of God. But our conversation says we don't believe that to be true. We condemn and put down others. We feel we are better than this group or that denomination. Is the reproach of the world rolled away from you? Only if you stand at the great Gilgal, the place where all reproach is rolled away, at the foot of the cross.

To repent we must first see the wrong. We must see that our hearts have not been circumcised. Where are the youth? What did we fail to do that the LORD cannot bring them here? Are our attitudes Christ like or world like? Are we humble or proud, gentle or strong, meek or arrogant? Have our attitudes and words been forgiving and full of blessing, or slanderous and full of curses? Before you say, "Not guilty", tell me where did the youth go or why the LORD has not brought the youth? Will you be satisfied as long as the church is around till you pass on, or will you refuse to be satisfied until you see the next generation in place to carry the torch with a purity of circumcised hearts? I'm including myself in these questions. I want God to give me a heart that won't be satisfied until I see the next generation on fire with the love of God, forsaking the world, sold out to God, an influence in every part of the coming culture. Only then can I say "the reproach is rolled away", from my generation, because then they are ready to go into battle, to claim the land for King Jesus. Should we be satisfied with less?

Josh 5:10-12 (NIV) 10 On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. 11 The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. 12 The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

Right with God, obedient in body and spirit, they are ready to celebrate deliverance. Now they can recall their breaking free from Egypt without the desire to go back. That is how you can know your heart is circumcised. You can celebrate your break from the world without the desire to go back to it.

Perhaps, up to this point, the LORD has babied you. He dropped spiritual food in your lap. Now that you've come to this place in your growth, it is time to open up God's word for yourself. Time to plant and harvest. Time to plough and to reap. You need to feed others now. Some of you are still eating manna, but a few are digging into God's word and reaping a harvest. You don't wait till Sunday. You want to eat every day. And because you take the time and effort to meet with God, you have to share with those in need. Are you still collecting manna from others? Maybe it is time you came to Gilgal, and forsake the things of the world that keep you from taking time with the LORD each day. Cooperate with God in that circumcision of your heart, then you can celebrate Passover with us.

That was what Jesus was doing when He instituted communion. He was celebrating deliverance. He was instituting a celebration of the reproach of the world being rolled away from the believer. Most importantly it is our salvation from the second death, from having to face the wrath of God. But it is also celebrating new life right now, also. We are no longer under the bondage of sin -in this life- if we will cooperate with God in that heart surgery. The blood Jesus was about to shed in our place that would make us right with God in eternity. But if we will cooperate with that circumcision of the heart today, we can live in Him in this life also, sensitive to the Holy Spirit, obedient to His voice. Then we will be ready to march into the spiritual battle at the LORD's direction.