

Marked by God, Led by the Commander (Joshua 5:1-15 and Colossians 2:6-15)

03-May-26

Joshua 5:1-15

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 they had crossed over, their hearts melted in fear and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.

Circumcision and Passover at Gilgal

² At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” 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 wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt. ⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness 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 he had solemnly promised their ancestors 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. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

⁹ 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.

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 the produce of Canaan.

The Fall of Jericho

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.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

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 so.

Colossians 2:6-15

Spiritual Fullness in Christ

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

Please have your **Bibles opened** up at **Joshua chapter 5**.

Let me pray first...

Context (Joshua 5:1)

[Slide-Context]

Last week we finished up where over a million Israelites made a miraculous crossing over the River Jordan – when God held back the raging river – and the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant – which represented the presence of God – led the people across the dry river bed – into the Promised Land of Canaan – for the first time.

As we pick up the story in Joshua chapter 5 – verse 1 – we discover that the occupants of Canaan – the Amorite kings and Canaanite kings have heard about this miraculous crossing (how could they not!) – and **their hearts melted in fear** – and any courage they might have had disappeared!

Who can blame them for being scared?

The river had made them feel safe from invasion – but God has shown nothing is impossible for Him – and also the sight of a million Israelites would be very intimidating!

(pause)

Now God's plan is for the Israelites to take control of the city of Jericho – we will deal with that next week.

Physically the Israelites might be ready for battle – but spiritually they are not – so in this chapter – God prepares them.

As Christians we too face a battle – not a physical battle or war – but a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:1)

So perhaps we can learn something from how God prepares the Israelites spiritually here.

In this chapter – God marks the Israelites – as His own – and prepares them...

1st point – the Israelites are **marked as God's people** – verses 2 to 8

[Slide-Marked as God's People]

Marked as God's People (Joshua 5:2-8)

God tells Joshua to circumcise the Israelites again (v2)

God doesn't mean those men who were already circumcised are to be circumcised again.

We quickly find out that all the circumcised fighting men who came out of Egypt had died in the wilderness (v4) – and all the males born during the wandering in the wilderness for 40 years had not been circumcised (v5) – and that was because the Israelites had disobeyed God (v6) – and hadn't kept God's command to circumcise all male boys, 8 days after their birth (Leviticus 12:3)

Why was circumcision so important anyway?

The command to circumcise all males was given to Abraham in the Genesis chapter 17 as the sign of God's covenant agreement with His people. The circumcision of each male marked them and their families as belonging to God – they were marked as God's people. It was like a visible badge saying, "I am part of God's promises."

Because it involves the removal of flesh, it symbolized the cutting away of any impurity and living a holy life and living differently from the surrounding nations – and symbolized being set apart for God

So because circumcision was neglected in the wilderness – God required Joshua here - to circumcise all the men – as a sign of their re-commitment to God and His promises – and to re-commit to obey God once more. It also served to identify them as God’s people.

Circumcising them right now - of course was risky because all the fighting men would be incapacitated for a few days (v8) – and the enemy could attack them during this time of recovery. God required Joshua and the Israelites to trust Him and trust in His protection.

Application

Now you might be thinking that’s great

But what has the circumcision of the Israelites got to do with me – especially if you’re a woman here this morning!

Well that’s where our NT reading from Colossians 2 comes in.

The Apostle Paul tells the Christians in Colossae in Colossians 2:11

In Him [Jesus] you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ.

What Paul is saying is when we become Christians – the Holy Spirit promised to us by Jesus - enters us – and **our hearts are circumcised** – and our old sinful

flesh is cut off so to speak – and we have circumcised hearts – hearts that are now towards Jesus and towards loving obedience to God.

Instead of the physical mark of circumcision of the Old Testament – in the New Testament – we have a different physical mark – we have the physical mark of Baptism – where the water of baptism symbolizes the washing away of our sins through the blood of Jesus when He died on the Cross.

The Apostle Paul describes it like this in our NT reading from Colossians 2:12

We have - *been buried with him [Jesus] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

So the picture is – if we imagine being baptized in a river – as we go under water – our old sinful-self dies under the water and we come out of the water joined in faith to Jesus – and our new life and identity is in Jesus now. We belong to Him – and we are marked as God’s people just like the Israelites were!

Praise God – it’s a lot less messy in the New Testament!

Praise God we have a new identity in Christ.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

2nd point – the Israelites are **marked as forgiven saved people** – verse 9

[Slide-marked as forgiven saved people]

Marked as Forgiven Saved People (Joshua 5:9)

In verse 9 God tells Joshua “*Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you?*”

Reproach here means someone who is suffering scorn, shame or disgrace.

When the Israelites lived in Egypt – they endured the scorn, shame and disgrace of being slaves.

God rescued them from this shame and disgrace – and finally after 40 years He has led them to the Promised Land – and rolled away that shame and disgrace.

In His grace – God is even willing to roll away the shame and disgrace of their disobedience against Him in the wilderness.

And it's kind of neat that the place God announces this to Joshua is called **Gilgal** – and the name Gilgal means “*a wheel or rolling*”. It's always worth checking out the meaning of place names in the Bible – they often have a special significance!

Application

For us...

Jesus has rolled away our reproach – He has rolled away our shame and disgrace caused by of our sinful disobedience to God.

Again in our NT reading from Colossians 2:13

Paul says - ***When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins!***

In our Bible study groups this week - some of us – including myself – got quite emotional about some of the bad things we had done in the past – and we felt ashamed.

Praise God – in Jesus – He has rolled away all the shame and disgrace of our past.

And as Paul says in Romans 8:1 - *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*

Praise God – in Jesus – we are marked as God’s forgiven saved people!

3rd point – the Israelites are **marked as redeemed people – verses 10-12**

[Slide-marked as redeemed people]

Marked as Redeemed People (Joshua 5:10-12)

As we look at v10 – we see that the Israelites celebrate **Passover**.

Remember the first Passover happened 40 years earlier – when God bought back His people – the Israelites – and redeemed them from a life of slavery.

On that first Passover – the Israelites had to paint the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the door posts and door frames of their homes in Egypt – so that their first-born child would not be killed – and the blood protected the first born from death – and the angel of death **passed over** their homes.

On that first Passover they celebrated with a meal – and God told them to always remember this day – each year.

Also on that first Passover - God promised He would not only rescue them from the Egyptians but would also bring them into “*a land flowing with milk and honey*” (Exodus 13:5)

So here in Joshua 5 – at the camp in Gilgal – as they celebrate and remember that first Passover – it is also **a fulfilment of God’s promise** – as the Israelites are now finally in that Promised Land of milk and honey!

On that day in Gilgal – in v12 – God stopped sending them manna – that bread from Heaven that God had provided each day for them to eat whilst they were in the wilderness.

Why does the manna stop?

Because they are in the Promised Land now – and they can eat the produce from the land!

God only provides directly when we can't provide for ourselves!

The Israelites are now in a situation where they can fend for themselves.

Application

For us

Just like the Israelites celebrated the Passover to remember what the Lord had done for them...

We should always remember what the Lord has done for us...

In our Bible study groups this week we were challenged to write down what God has done for us.

If we really think about it – the list is endless.

A couple of hymns spring to mind...

Count your blessings, name them one by one;

Count your blessings, see what God hath done;

Count your blessings, name them one by one,

And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

And

*To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
so loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.*

Also - Just like the Israelites - we are God's redeemed people

Just like on that first Passover – where the blood of the lamb saved the first born and redeemed God's people from slavery.

Jesus – the Lamb of God – is our Passover Lamb – and His blood saves us from the punishment of our sin – which is death – and He redeems us from our slavery to sin.

In our NT reading

The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Colossians 2:13

Jesus having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

Jesus has paid the debt of our sin – and redeemed us – and bought us back into a right relationship with God – and all our sins have been nailed to His cross!

Also, the manna – the bread that God sent daily to the Israelites to eat in the wilderness should remind us of our Lord Jesus – He describes Himself in John 6:32 as the “***the true bread from Heaven...which gives life to the World***”

And Jesus says in John 6:35 – “***I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty***”

Jesus is the bread that gives eternal life.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer – and we pray “*give us this day our daily bread*” – we are not just asking for physical food – we are asking for spiritual food.

Just like we have a feed at breakfast, lunch and dinner

We are to have a feed on God's Word.

Remember Jesus IS God's Word – so we should be devouring God's Word daily – that's how we remain close to God – and learn from Jesus.

We might not remember what we had for dinner last Tuesday – but when we ate it – we enjoyed it and were nourished. Likewise each time we feed off God's Word – we are nourished and enriched and spurred on.

Back to Joshua then...

The Israelites have now been

1st – Marked as God's People

2nd – Marked as Forgiven Saved People

3rd – Marked as God's Redeemed People

They are now ready for the Battle of Jericho – in chapter 6

They have their leader Joshua

They are ready

Or are they?

Not quite

Our last point is – **People of God are led by the Commander** – verses 13 to 15

[Slide-led by the Commander]

People of God are led by the Commander (Joshua 5:13-15)

In verse 13 Joshua comes face to face with a man with a drawn sword

And Joshua asked the commander “*Are you for us or for our enemies?*”

In other words – ‘*are you on our side or the enemies side?*’

It turns out Joshua is speaking to the commander of the army of the Lord (v14) – and really Joshua is asking the wrong question.

It’s not a question of God joining Joshua and the Israelites army – it’s a matter of Joshua and the Israelites joining God’s army – and a matter of Joshua and the Israelites being led by God – and following God’s way!

Last week in chapter 3 – **Joshua was exalted by God** – to show the people that God had chosen Joshua just like He had chosen Moses – and to show the people they can trust and follow Joshua like they did with Moses.

But this week – **Joshua is humbled** – he might be the leader of the Israelites – but God shows Joshua he is outranked by the commander of the army of the Lord! Joshua needs to understand his place.

And he does.

V14 – Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence to the commander and asked “*What message does my Lord have for his servant?*”.

Joshua is humble enough to know – the Lord is in control – and Joshua is merely the Lord’s servant!

Surely a lesson we all need to learn – we are humble servants of the Lord – and nothing more!

Who is this commander that Joshua faces?

Some say an angel – but there is enough evidence in this passage and elsewhere in the Bible to suggest this is **an appearance of our Lord Jesus**.

The reasons for saying that are:

1. Joshua wouldn't fall face down in reverence and worship an angel – that would be blasphemous!
2. In v15 the Commander tells Joshua to remove his sandals because the place Joshua is standing on is holy. A place can only be holy if it is set apart by God or has God's presence. Just like when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3 – and said the place where Moses was standing was also holy ground
3. If the commander is indeed Jesus – our NT reading from Colossians 2:9 says *“for in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form”* – in other words **Jesus is fully God!** So, Joshua IS standing in the presence of God – because Jesus is fully God!
4. Also, in the book of Revelation chapter 19 (verses 11 to 21) – it describes the return of Jesus one day as King and Judge of all the world. Jesus is described as faithful and true (v11); as the Word of God (v13) and as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (v16). And He is riding a white horse (v11) and the armies of Heaven are following Him (v14). That makes Jesus the commander of the Lord's army.

And that's why the commander Joshua faces is most likely Jesus Himself.

Application

The point for us to take on board is

Joshua submitted to the authority of the Commander – Jesus.

We too must submit to Jesus' authority – He is our Commander in chief – and we are His subjects and His servants!

All of our life should be handed over to Him!

If we can imagine our life as driving a car?

Who is in the driver's seat?

If we are in the driver's seat – we need to swap seats – and Jesus should be in the driver's seat – and we should be in the passenger seat.

Better still – we should be in the boot!

I said earlier this year – I'd resigned as CEO of the Universe.

We all must resign – and not try to control things ourselves – and when we do feel like controlling everything – we need to get out of that driver's seat again!

Conclusion/Our Battle (Colossians 2:6)

To finish up then

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Joshua 5 shows us this—**before the battle, God prepares His people.**

Not with weapons.

But spiritually.

The people are...

Marked as His.

Forgiven.

Redeemed.

And submitted to their Commander.

And what about our battle?

It's not Jericho—our battle is - sin, temptation, and the pull of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in the spiritual realm that try to take control of our lives! (Ephesians 6:12)

So how do we prepare?

Our NT reading - from **Colossians 2:6** has the answer:

[Slide-Colossians 2:6]

“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.”

We started our Christian walk - with Jesus - by faith—

And we continue with Him the same way.

Remember who we are:

Marked.

Forgiven.

Redeemed.

And remember this—

We don't fight **for** victory,

but **from** victory.

Because Jesus has already won.

So we stay in Him.

We submit to Him.

We follow our Commander.

And we'll be ready for the battle!

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you that you prepare us and call us to belong to you. Forgive us for relying on our own strength instead of submitting to you. Thank you that in Christ our reproach is taken away and we are made new. Help us to walk in humility, to trust your ways, and to live aware of your presence. Prepare us for what lies ahead, and lead us under your authority. Amen.

Benediction (Colossians 2:6-7)

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. AMEN.