



Have you noticed there is something mesmerizing about watching Olympic divers? Poised far above the swimming pool, they prepare to summersault four and a half times into the water. Each diver approaches the board with the hopes of winning gold. Then there are the athletes who participate in synchronized diving. For them it seems to be more difficult. Think about the Olympic team of Boudia and Steele. They are a team but also very individualistic. It's not like soccer or volleyball where each player has a different role to play on the team. And it's not like synchronized swimming, where swimmers are aware of each other and can adjust their routine based on their partner. A diver cannot adjust to a partner when they are 50 feet in the air; they must do their best individually.

Men and women who are disciplined in synchronized diving have prepared for years to look like one person in the air. This kind of training requires lots of preparation. Each set of divers has a unique routine before their dive. Right before each dive, the team of Boudia and Steele say "four-six" to each other, a reference to Philippians 4:6 which begins with *"Do not be anxious about anything..."*

A few weeks ago we started our current teaching series Ventures in Faith. Today we're going to look at Joshua 5 and see how the Israelites prepare for their upcoming victory. What will their final preparations look like? What will the Israelites need to do before they enter and possess the Promised Land? Let's think bigger than just the nation of Israel. When you think about your life, do you feel like you are preparing for a life of victory? Do you even know what victory would look like? For a Christ-follower the victory is over sin and finding the hope of heaven. Most people I talk to don't feel that victorious.

My guess is that you will be shocked at how God's prepares His people for victory. The events in Joshua 5 span a ten-day time period. This morning you'll see the Israelites renew the Lord's covenant. Then you'll see them celebrate the goodness of God. After that, you'll see God reaffirm His presence with His people. Listen to how chapter 5 starts.

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 (v. 5).

The kings who opposed Israel have no courage left. In Joshua 3 and 4, we saw how God parted the Jordan River, so these kings just got an up-close view of who the Lord is. This is a key part of the story. God put a deep fear in the hearts of the kings just as Rahab had told the spies back in chapter 2. *"Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 'I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below'"* (verses 8-11).

Renewing the Lord's Covenant

Maybe Joshua knew the kings were afraid, or maybe he didn't. Joshua's role in leading God's people was to obey God's commands.

At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again." So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth (verses 2-3).

Wait, what just happened? The Israelites just crossed the Jordan River and the kings who would oppose them have lost their courage. Any great army commander would not stop to circumcise all the males; including the fighting men. At this point you would expect Joshua to press forward, advance into the land, and capitalize on the situation at hand. This is the time to strike!

But a mark of Joshua's life is obedience to God. Look at verse 3: Joshua responds in obedience to God's command. It sounds crazy, right? Can you imagine how this conversation went in the camp of the Israelites? Joshua hears from God and then goes and tells the men they must be circumcised before they can enter the land. We are all aware of what male circumcision is so I will avoid any details of what the procedure requires! I imagine some of the men trying to talk Joshua out of the ritual by saying things like, "Joshua, we can do that tomorrow, let's go conquer these kings now!" or "Joshua, are you sure we need to do this today?" They are grown men and it would be extremely painful for them! This circumcision would not come in a sterile hospital room but would be done with a crude knife in the middle of the desert.

If you're not familiar with the Bible you might be confused about this section and what is taking place. Let me quickly share the

importance of these men being circumcised. Back in Genesis 17, God gave the covenant of circumcision to Abraham. It was a covenant that God would take a 99-year-old childless man and make his family as numerous as the stars in the sky. The covenant was originally intended to be performed on a baby at eight days old. It was painful for the boys at that age, and will be painful for the men now. It's interesting to know that the human body naturally produces Vitamin K on the eighth day. It sure sounds like God knew what He was doing when He established this covenant with Abraham.

Their circumcision was meant to be a physical sign on their bodies that their lives were dedicated to God and not the sinful practices of the nations around them. That is why Joshua 5:2 says, "Again." As the account continues in Joshua 5:4-8, we gain a better understanding of what has happened. These verses are a summary of Israel's wandering in the desert for the last 40 years. It recounts the rebellion of Israel and their failure to follow the Lord. They thought they knew better than God and lacked the faith to fully trust God. Because of that, the people died and now it's time to prepare the next generation who will enter the Promised Land.

After all the men were circumcised, verse 8 tells us they remained in the camp until they were healed.

And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed (v. 8).

Remember in verse 1 when we read about how the other kings were shaking in their boots with fear? Because of what God accomplished in parting the Jordan, it caused the kings to be fearful. The kings saw the powerful hand of the Lord. This gave the Israelites the time and space to heal. They were able to renew the covenant with God. This was part of their preparation to take the Promised Land that we will read about in Joshua chapter 6.

You may be wondering if they really had to be circumcised to take the land. They did. They needed to remember the covenant God made with Abraham. They needed to remember that they were God's chosen people. The truth is that God makes His people holy. Their circumcision exposed how Israel had forgotten about God these last 40 years. Even though they had forgotten about God, God hadn't forgotten about them. God continued to guide them, God protected them, and God fed them with manna every day. God took the first step to renew the covenant of circumcision with His people.

After Joshua's obedience, listen to what God says in verse 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.

There is a word play going on here. Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word גלל (gll) which means to roll away. It appears there is a word play going on here. Through circumcision God rolled away

the reproach of Egypt. But what is the reproach of Egypt? It might be the stubbornness of the people. It might have been a lack of faith during the exodus. There is a Biblical commentator named Warren Wiersbe who wrote this in his commentary on the book of Joshua: "God easily took His people out of Egypt, but it was difficult for Him to take Egypt out of His people."

It reminds me of the old movie *The Shawshank Redemption* featuring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman. Morgan Freeman plays the character Red who is released from prison after serving 40 years for murder. Once he is free, he finds it difficult to integrate back into society. He is very used to prison life and has a hard time at his new job. He feels unsafe as a citizen because his routine is so different on the outside. He struggles with his freedom and considers committing a crime just so he can go back to prison. Red is just like the Israelites. Even though he is out of prison life, it is hard to take the prison life out of him.

What is the application here for us? Circumcision was a physical rite that marked God's people. It was a cutting off of the skin to mark a person as holy for God. God doesn't want your skin to be cut, instead He wants your heart to be dedicated to Him. In the book of Colossians, Paul writes to Gentiles and encourages them to have their hearts circumcised. *"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, 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"* (Col. 2:11-12). Your circumcision came from God. Its goal is to cut out the parts of your life that aren't holy so you may be used for God's purposes. Christ-followers don't need to be circumcised as a rite today. Instead for those who long to follow Jesus they can participate in water baptism.

Has God has been asking to cut something out of your life? Maybe it's something external, like a relationship you know you shouldn't be in. Maybe it's an addiction you've had for years and God wants to cut it out. Could it be vulgarity in your speech or anger that flares up at random times? Could it be what your eyes are focused on? What we're talking about here is not something you want to hang on to, but it's a struggle that you need to allow God to cut out of your life. If the Spirit has been prompting you on this, will you allow Him to work? All summer I felt like God was prompting me to get off social media because of the distraction it is in my life. It was something external but it was also something deeper.

It might not be something external that God wants to cut out. *"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"* (Deut. 10:6). Externally your life might look amazing but it could be something deeper inside you. It could be a deep set greed. It could be inflated feelings of

self-worth because of the diploma hanging on your wall. Maybe it's a struggle with materialism and the launch of the iPhone this week did not help. It could be a selfish attitude that is hurting your relationships with others. It might be pride that is hindering you from trusting fully in God. Will you allow God to cut that thing out of your life? This might be the first time you trust Him to cut out something, or it could be the hundredth time He is prompting you. Just as the Jews submitted to God's will in the desert, you too can yield to the Spirit as you truly encounter the living God. Remember this, it might be painful and it could require time to heal from it but your life will be better.

Celebrating the Goodness of the Lord

Back to the Bible account: After the men had healed, there was a great celebration as the entire nation celebrated the Passover meal.

On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. 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 (verses 10-12).

The men had to be circumcised so they could be able to celebrate the Passover meal. God made His people so they could celebrate the Passover and remember His goodness. The Passover meal is a holy celebration for the Jews. We have all the particulars of the story: the location, the date, who was involved and what they did. Interestingly enough, there is no mention of the preparation of the Passover Lamb. The focus of these verses is not on the Passover meal; the primary point is that upon celebrating, the manna ceased to exist. The repetition is on how the manna ceased to exist and that the people ate the food of Canaan.

This is the turning of the page in the history of Israel. Their lives are about to drastically change. For the last 40 years they couldn't buy new clothes on Amazon because they had no shipping address; they were wandering in the desert. There was no In-n-Out burger for them to eat; they survived off manna from God. The generation in this story is the younger generation, the ones who didn't see God lead their parents and grandparents out of Egypt. They would have heard about the Passover, but it's likely they had never celebrated it themselves. This is their first time celebrating the goodness of the Lord.

The Passover celebration is a reminder of God's goodness to His people. The night before Israel left Egypt, each family was to kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorframe of their homes. When the Lord came during the night, He would "pass over" each home where He saw the blood. The blood was an indication that the people in that home were the people of God. Israel was instructed to celebrate the Passover every year as a remembrance

of how God had saved His people. *"When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony"* (Ex. 12:25). The new generation is now obeying the command of Moses, so the second thing they do to prepare for victory is celebrate the Passover. I'll bet you didn't see that coming either!

The Passover celebration reminds us what Christ did. The death of Jesus Christ is typified in the Passover celebration. Are you a person who celebrates? The Israelites had great reason to celebrate. God sustained them for 40 years as they wandered in the wilderness! God's people should be the most joyous celebratory people on the face of the earth. I encourage you to gather with others and celebrate the goodness of the Lord. Celebrate His protection in your life. Celebrate how He sustains your life. Celebrate the good things He's provided you and how He has cared for you. Don't just celebrate once, celebrate on a regular basis and celebrate with others because the biggest thing there is to celebrate in this life is that Jesus Christ came to this earth to die for our sins. We celebrate this each time we gather.

Reaffirming the Lord's Presence

After the people celebrated the goodness of the Lord, it appears that God has prepared them completely for the victory. But there is one final thing that needed to occur: Joshua needs to know that presence of the Lord is there.

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?"

"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?"

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 (verses 13-15).

Joshua was a leader who would not move unless God was with him. I imagine that Joshua is out praying around dusk and asking God for direction. While walking in the desert, he encountered this man standing in the way with a sword. Joshua doesn't respond in fear; instead he engages this man in a conversation.

Joshua asks a reasonable question, "Who's side are you on?" It's reasonable because Joshua needs to know if he will need to engage in battle with this man. His response tells a lot. He is on neither side. There is some debate as to who this person is standing before Joshua. He identifies himself as the commander of the army of the Lord. Well, if the Israelites are God's chosen people and Joshua is their leader, then wouldn't Joshua be the commander of the army of the Lord?

In his eulogy for Abraham Lincoln, Reverend Matthew Simpson said these words, "To a minister who hoped the Lord was on our

[The Union's] side, He [Lincoln] replied that it gave him no concern whether the Lord was on our side or not. 'For,' he [Lincoln] added, 'I know the Lord is always on the side of the right. But God is my witness that is my constant anxiety and prayer that both myself and this nation should be on the Lord's side.'" Instead of wondering if God is on **your** side, maybe you should figure out if you are on **God's** side. The nation of Israel was on God's side; they showed it in their actions. Joshua was on God's side and he shows it with his response here.

We have two great army commanders standing face to face in the middle of the desert. Upon learning who this person is, Joshua falls to the ground in worship. I think this person is the Lord Jesus Christ. I think this because he doesn't rebuke Joshua for worshipping Him. If this was an angel, it would have rebuked Joshua like the angel rebuked John in the book of Revelation, "*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, 'Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!'"*" (Rev. 22:8-9). But in this encounter, the man doesn't stop Joshua from worshipping. Joshua asks the man what message He has for him. Joshua was anticipating that God would meet him as he sought Him out.

Some of you are walking through life feeling utterly defeated. You feel like everything in this life is against you—things are going horrible at your job; you're scared you might get fired this week, next week or next month. You have massive uncertainty about your employment status. Some of you are looking at your retirement and you're not sure you're going to be able to make it. You love living on the Peninsula but the financial pressure of retirement and increased cost of living is making things tough. Some of you walked in here feeling like a failure as a parent. You have read numerous parenting books, taken courses, talked with friends but you still can't seem to connect with your son or daughter.

It might not be about work, finances or parenting, but there is something troubling you. There are things that are troubling me today. I have struggles in life and there are times that I wonder if God is on my side. This passage is such a great reminder for us because it helps us shift our thinking. It's not about if God's on my side; it's about if I'm on God's side. There are things you're experiencing today that are tough for you to understand but years later they will make sense. There are situations you're stuck right in the middle of and later they will make sense. I've often said that suffering is the greatest tool God uses to shape our lives.

Let's go back and look at Joshua's life and his response here. Joshua's life is marked by obedience to God. Joshua aligns himself with God and doesn't expect God to align Himself with his plans. Joshua responds in the most appropriate way; he falls down as a servant to the Lord. Instead of trying to get God to line up with your plan, make a choice to line up with God. God is preparing you to fight sin and live a life for Him. Everything we've looked at in Joshua 5 culminates to this: God makes His people holy so they are ready to be used for His holy purposes. God told Joshua to remove his sandals so God could make Joshua holy and he would be ready to be used for God's holy purposes. We should do the same in worship and obedience so that God can make us holy and ready to be used for His glory.

At the beginning of this sermon I asked you, "How will God prepare His people for victory?" If you don't feel like you're living a victorious life, this might be a good time to pause and reconnect with God. Before the Israelites could enter the Promised Land God needed to prepare them in three ways. It was a time of waiting and fighting against everything that seemed humanly logical. It was a time of patience to prepare for the victory God will bring in Joshua 6. Let me remind you of the three ways: God renewed His covenant with them. The people celebrated the goodness of the Lord in the Passover meal. Finally God reaffirms His presence is with His people in His meeting with Joshua.

God doesn't require circumcision from His people anymore but there are things in your life He wants to cut out. Will you surrender to Him on this? Will you allow God to cut something out of your life this week? It might be painful but in the end it will be better because it will prepare you for the victorious life God has in store for you. Make sure to be a person who celebrates the goodness of the Lord. Celebrate how God sustains you and provides for you. Take some time, this week to celebrate with others. Celebrate how Jesus came to earth to die for your sins and bring you into the presence of God. Celebrate how Jesus is preparing you to enter Heaven and spend eternity with Him.

God wants to prepare us for the victorious life. This means falling down and worshipping Him. This is a dropping of our pride and worshipping Him in full submission. It's a shifting of our thinking and aligning ourselves with God and not expecting God to bend to our wishes.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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