



For the past three weeks our church has been learning about living the adventurous life that God is calling us to live. The action in the book of Joshua has been building.

In Joshua 1 a new leader is appointed: Joshua. In Joshua 2 spies are sent to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Jericho. In Joshua 3 and 4 the entire nation of over 1 million people cross, on dry land, where the Jordan River normally flows. God's people, fresh off a life-changing miracle, are ready for action. They're ready to "drive out" the inhabitants of the Promised Land, just as God told them they would.

**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 (Josh. 5:1).**

This looks like the perfect time to act. The Canaanites saw the hordes of Israelites spread out along the eastern ridge of the Jordan Valley. Their plan of invasion was obvious. But they felt secure because the flooded, raging Jordan River was protecting them. Then the waters ceased flowing and the people walked across on dry land. Their hearts melted in fear! For the Israelites, as all of these circumstances are lining up, worldly wisdom says, "Go, strike while the people are so fearful." But that's exactly the opposite of God's plan. God gives the people a Necessary Delay.

In Joshua 5 we learn an important lesson that every follower of Jesus Christ needs to learn: It's better to get right with God before acting for God.

Why is this an important lesson to learn? Because all of us want to do something significant, impactful or great in our lives. No one plans to be mediocre. So here's what I do. See if you can relate.

I have my desires to make a big impact—to be great dad, a great preacher, a winning coach, to make other peoples' lives better, to write a book someday. I think God places desires like these in my heart. And add to this: I really love the Lord and want others to know him too; that's acting for God. When I mix them all together, it seems logical and good to devote my actions to work that make a big impact for God. Can anyone relate to that?

God is going to teach a lesson in Joshua 5 to anyone who can relate. The lesson is that it's better to get right with God before acting for God.

God does this in three ways in Joshua 5. God gives them A Necessary Delay and reveals three aspects of Himself to His people:

- God is a Promise Keeper
- God is a Provider
- God is Primary

### **God is a Promise Keeper**

**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... And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed (verses 2-3, 8).**

In verses 4-7 we're told that none of these desert wanderers had been circumcised. God orchestrates a Necessary Delay in the action to circumcise the men. For a modern reader, this seems very strange. What's going on here? Couldn't this be done later? Let me explain circumcision and its meaning in ancient Israel.

Anyone who's been around a baby boy is familiar with modern-day circumcision. Our boys are circumcised for hygiene and health reasons. In the Ancient Near East, circumcision held spiritual significance. If you go back to Genesis 15 and 17, we learn of the covenant God makes to Abram. A covenant is like a Super Promise. In Genesis 15 and 17 God had promised two things to Abraham over 600 years ago: God promised to be their God and God promised to give them the Promised Land. Circumcision was the ceremonial response of the men indicating two things: I receive God's Covenant promise on behalf of my family and I "cut off" the ways of the world and pledge obedience to God.

By giving His people a Necessary Delay, God is reminding them of these core promises that He's made to them, making sure that the people are on board to receive these promises, and giving the people the chance to affirm their obedience to God,

Did you know that before a person can receive their lottery winnings they have to complete a Lottery Winner Claim Form? They've won the money. They have the winning ticket in their hand with the promise of the State of California to give them all the money. But the person has to do something in order to receive the free money. There is an action of agreeing to receive the money completing the form and signing it.

That's kind of like this ceremony of circumcision. The only way to make it more like circumcision would be the pledge of every Lottery Winner to spend their money wisely. That would be like the pledge to live in obedience to God.

For the people of God in the Ancient Near East the action of receiving the Promise of God and pledging obedience to Him was circumcision. For the people of God, after the resurrection of Jesus, the action of receiving the Promise of God is baptism. Baptism has replaced circumcision. Colossians 2 tells us that baptism is a new and better physical sign and ceremony. And every follower of Jesus Christ should be baptized as a sign that they've accepted the free promise of salvation that God offers and pledge to live obediently to Him.

In Joshua 5, by having the men get circumcised, the people are being taught an important lesson: it's better to get right with God before acting for God.

The second aspect God reveals about Himself in this Necessary Delay is that God is a Provider.

### **God is a Provider**

**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).**

Five examples of God's Provision are seen in these three verses: The meal they share together is the Passover—a ceremonial meal of remembrance celebrating God's protection from the tenth plague in Egypt. Manna is mentioned. For the 40 years of wandering in the desert, since food is scarce, God miraculously fed them with manna. This mysterious stuff would appear on the ground in the morning and evening, every day. Now, just barely in the Promised Land, the Israelites eat food and produce from the land of Canaan.

The point is that God provides everything His people need. He's faithfully provided food for 40 years; count on Him to faithfully provide, although in a different manner, in the future.

Don't you think this would have been encouraging to this wandering band of Israelites? Not only is God a Promise Keeper, He's their Provider. I can imagine one of them saying, "we need a provider ... because we've got nothing." These verses were God's tangible and tasty lesson to teach them "I will provide for you."

How does this relate to Jesus? God's provision of food through extraordinary means is more significant than food. God is teaching them a bigger lesson—that He is a Provider of their deepest needs through extraordinary means. That's seen and

experienced in Jesus. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God demonstrated his eternal provision. He provided salvation. That's the best way He revealed that He is good and loving. It's the reason we love Him. He provides love for us, salvation for us, grace for us.

With the ceremony of circumcision God was communicating to His people, "I am a Promise Keeper, live in obedient relationship with me." Now with the five mentions of food, God is communicating, "I am a Provider, accept my extraordinary provision." As much as we'd like to do for God, it's vital and good for God's people to know that it's better to get right with God before acting for God.

The next Necessary Delay in the action will teach us of the importance of putting God first.

### **God is Primary**

**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 (army of angels) 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).**

Commentators and theologians agree that this "man" who's the commander of an army of angels is the pre-incarnate Jesus. If this is a surprise to you, there are a few occasions in the Old Testament where a man appears and it's obvious that he's no ordinary man.

This "man" doesn't stop Joshua from bowing down and worshipping him and even instructs him to take off his sandals because the area is holy. Those are behaviors of God. When angels appeared and people bowed to worship them, the angels always stopped them from worshipping them. But not in this situation. This isn't the appearance of God the Father in a burning bush. It is the appearance of the pre-incarnate Jesus as a man.

What are we to learn from this? The answer is revealed in Jesus' reply to the question, "Whose side are you on?" "Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Isn't this a fascinating response? Wouldn't we assume that the response would be, "I'm for you and your army Joshua. You're my people.?"

We should always hold what we think are the plans of the Lord with open palms. Sure, we move out in faith. But it's always the Lord's plan and the Lord's prerogative to reveal to us, "actually, **this**, over here ... is the plan."

The lesson being taught here is that God is Primary, meaning that Joshua and his army don't dictate to God how He should act. But instead that Joshua and his army should follow where God leads and join God in His work. God leads; people follow. God is always for His own glory. God is bigger than any one church or any one denomination or any one country. It's God's story and we get to be a part of it if we are willing to follow Him.

This attitude and approach was modeled in the early church in Acts 13. As thousands of new converts were being added to the church, the leaders of the church in Antioch had more work to do than they had minutes in a day. But they knew that it's better to get right with God before acting for God. So they are praying and fasting; they are making God Primary. *"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off"* (Acts 13:2-3).

Isn't that awesome! As these leaders were making God Primary—getting right with God before they acted for God—it's like God said, "Ok, here are some people I can change the world with!"

When Louie graduated seminary he didn't sense God clearly leading him to any of the church positions that were offered to him. As he was seeking God, he sensed that God wanted him to move to Waco, Texas. Even with his girlfriend enrolled at Baylor University and the possibility of another graduate degree, this was a strange place to go!

The fall he arrived in Waco a group of students approached him with the idea of starting a Bible Study. He could teach. They knew a guy named Sam who played piano and sang; he could lead worship. And they could invite their friends.

Louie didn't say yes immediately. Instead, he made a counter proposal. He said, "how about we pray about this together for one month and see if God's in this or not? We can meet every Monday night at 8:00 and just pray." That sounds like the leaders of the Antioch church, doesn't it? It sounds just like Joshua worshipping the Lord in the verses we just read. After a month of praying together, they had more students than they had when they'd started and God seemed to be saying, "Start the Bible study."

When I arrived at Baylor five years later, there were 1000 students involved; 10% of the student body attended. Explosive numerical growth and deep spiritual transformation happened:

- The Choice Bible Study launched hundreds of students into ministry.
- The Choice Bible Study inspired dozens of other campus-based Bible studies, ministering to tens of thousands.

- The Choice Bible Study morphed into the Passion Conferences.
- The Passion Conferences launched Chris Tomlin, David Crowder, Christy Nockles and Christian Stanfield.
- The Passion Conferences have hosted over 1 million college-aged students and launched hundreds of thousands into living a life sold out for God.

And I am one of those lives. It was during my years of being taught and mentored by Louie that I got to witness a man who put flesh on the spiritual principle of putting God first. Because of his lifestyle of getting right with God before acting for God, Louie Giglio has become one of the most influential Christian leaders in the world today.

It would be natural for us to think that Jesus was for Louie. But if Louie were here today and we asked him, he'd say something like this, "The Lord is always about His glory and His renown. I've just had the great privilege to play a small part in spreading it."

The Lord was and is for Himself and He is looking for someone who would follow His lead and join Him in his work. For Louie it was to bring the light of Jesus to college students. What is it for you? Maybe you know. Maybe you don't know. It's discovered as we get right with God, as described in this chapter.

Joshua's posture at the end of Chapter 5—bowed down, sandals off, worshipping the Lord—is the posture God wants from our hearts and lives. It's a place of total surrender. There's plenty of time to do things for God. The Israelite army will enter the Promised Land in the next chapter. But for this moment, we are being taught that it's better to get right with God before acting for God.

James Boice said, "We also need to learn this lesson. Americans are always anxious to rush ahead with some program, and the larger the effort and the faster it is executed, the better. We need to learn that this is not always God's way. What we do is important. But what we are is more important still. It is more important that God have our hearts and minds than our swords."

In what way do you need to surrender to God today? Is there something you've been attempting to do in your own strength and ingenuity for God? If so, are you willing take a step back and get right with God today? Are you in an on-going delay, wondering how long this will take? Will you turn to the Lord today with a fresh attitude of surrender?

*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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300 Piedmont Avenue | San Bruno, CA 94066 | 650 349.1278 | [www.cpcweb.org](http://www.cpcweb.org). Additional copies available on request.