

# Preparing For A New Beginning

Sermon 4 – No Running Please! Joshua 5

Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church, March 12, 2006

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Read Joshua 5:1...

Have you ever been faced with an opportunity that seemed perfect? I mean absolutely everything looked like it was going your way!

That was the situation the people of Israel were in. Absolutely everything was going their way. God had just brought them through the Jordan River in a miraculous fashion. Just ahead was Jericho. And the people of Jericho, like everyone else in the land, were scared to death of them. See 6:1...

What better time than right then to rush ahead, seize their opportunity, and take Jericho. Isn't that what we would do? Such opportunities come along so rarely and as a result, without taking the time to think it through, to take counsel with the Lord, or to make sure we are ready, we run ahead and what seemed to be one of our greatest opportunities ends up to be one of our greatest failures.

Israel was facing one of those opportunities but instead of running ahead God had them slow down as He gave them four reminders of His involvement in their lives.

We are about to enter an opportunity, which I believe comes from God, that most church members have never experienced. I am not talking about the building, I am talking about the opportunity the Lord will give us with the building- it is an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of more than just a few people and we would do well to remember God's involvement in our life before we run ahead into that opportunity.

## **Reminder # 1 – Circumcision / God's Covenant**

First, the people of Israel were to be circumcised as a reminder of God's covenant or promise. See verses 2-9...

Circumcision is the cutting off of a specific portion of a man's flesh. The Bible calls it the foreskin. The reason this was necessary for the Israelites as they prepared to possess their opportunity is provided in verses 4-5.

The men of Israel who had been circumcised in Egypt had all died in the wilderness. Their sons, born during the wilderness wanderings, had not been. It was this new generation, who had come through the Jordan River and was now preparing to possess the land of promise that needed to be circumcised.

As you read through this portion of Scripture that word is used 9 times, so obviously God placed great value upon it. Perhaps you wonder why? Why would the cutting off of a

piece of flesh be so important? Well, the answer goes back to Genesis 17. There, God made a covenant with Abraham. It was a one-sided promise. God was going to bless Abraham. There were 2 parts to the covenant. God promised, *I will be your God, and I will give you the land.* Abraham was then circumcised as a sign of that covenant. It was to be a constant reminder of God's promise to the descendants of Abraham and of their identity with Him.

And so what a tremendous occasion it was for the people of Israel as they were on the verge of possessing the land to first reaffirm this covenant. God was reminding them that just as He had promised He was now giving them the land. It must have been very reassuring!

It also was to remind them of their identity with God. He was their God. Circumcision was an act of identification. It spoke of a separation that needed to take place in their lives. They were to be set apart from the people of the land and the sins of the land wholly unto the Lord.

This was not just to be a physical marking but a symbol of their whole life. See Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6...

God was reminding them, as they were about to seize their opportunity that they needed to be set apart from the rest of the world and be wholly identified with Him.

Now that isn't always easy. When I first read verses 2-3, my thought was "*Ouch!*" I've got some flint knives, made by Indians, at home and without a doubt that would have been painful.

It is not always easy to be set apart from the rest of the world to be identified with God. Sometimes it can be very painful. But it is necessary if we want to be victorious in the opportunities that God gives to us.

In verse 9 we find that when Israel did so God rolled away the reproach of Egypt. The Egyptians had scoffed at the Israelites (Exodus 32:12) suggesting that God had delivered them from Egypt only to kill them in the mountains. But when they were circumcised that day in the land of promise they were delivered from that accusation. God reassured them, *I am your God and I am keeping my promise to you.*

It should be of interest to us that the Bible says we too, as believers, have been circumcised. See Colossians 2:11-15...

Four aspects of our circumcision are emphasized in these verses:

- (1) It is made without hands. It is spiritual not physical.
- (2) We are buried and raised with Christ. We are identified with Him.
- (3) Our sins are forgiven. The reproach of this world has been removed.
- (4) Christ has already won the victory. We are to live in it!

Just as Israel needed to be reminded of their identity with God before seizing their opportunity, don't you think we should?

Sometimes we forget and it is hard to tell us apart from the rest of the world when we are supposed to be identified with God. Here's the danger- 40 years earlier Israel stood on the verge of God's promise, the greatest opportunity of their life, but because they forgot their identity with God they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years of failure.

We also can wander from failure to failure when we don't take the time to remember we belong to God and not this world. As we prepare to seize our opportunity from God let us not forget that we are to be identified with Him and separated from the world.

### **Reminder # 2 – Passover / God's Deliverance**

In our passage, as the people of Israel camped at Gilgal, they also kept the Passover as a reminder of God's deliverance. See verse 10...

This was only the third time Israel had kept the Passover. The second time was when they were at the foot of Mount Sinai. The first time was just before they left Egypt (Exodus 12).

On that first occasion God was going to pass through the land of Egypt in judgment, but that they might know that He makes a difference between His people and the people of the world they were to put the blood of the Passover Lamb on their doorposts and when God would see the blood He would Passover their home. They would be delivered from God's judgment.

That was then established as a memorial for generations to come so that they would remember how God had delivered them from the plague of death and the bondage of Egypt. What a reassuring reminder it must have been, as they camped on the plains of Jericho and celebrated the Passover once again. It reminded them that just as God had delivered their fathers in the past He would continue to do so for them in the present.

We have that same reassurance and more for the Bible teaches we also have a Passover Lamb. See 1 Corinthians 5:7...

Jesus Christ as a lamb without blemish was sacrificed and His blood shed so that we might not taste death and that we might be delivered from the bondage of sin. He is the Passover Lamb for every child of God.

As we face whatever opportunities the Lord gives to us but especially the opportunity we have as a church right now we need to remember that God delivered us out of bondage and death that He might make a difference in us and through us. He has done so much to get us this far He is not going to forsake us now. He is going to take us the rest of the way.

That's the intention of the Lord's Supper, which was instituted by Christ. We keep it in remembrance of what He did for us at the cross. There He delivered us from the bondage of sin and death. But Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper not just so we would look back, He also gave it that we would be reminded to look ahead till He comes again. And between now and then He is going to complete in us the work He has begun. We can count on it!

### **Reminder # 3 – Unleavened Bread / God's Provision**

On the day after they kept the Passover, as established by God, Israel ate unleavened bread. See verses 11-12...

This was a reminder of God's provision (Exodus 12:33-34; 13:3-5). Unleavened bread reminded Israel specifically of three things:

- (1) The haste in which they left Egypt.
- (2) Their freedom from the corruption and bondage of Egypt.
- (3) God's provision awaiting them in the land of promise.

It is God's provision that is emphasized in Joshua 5 with two dramatic events: First, on the day after the Passover they ate of the produce of the land. Now someone might wonder what's so special about that? Well, put yourself in their place. They left Egypt in such a hurry they had no time to take provision for the journey but now they were in the land of promise eating the produce of that land. That was pretty exciting.

But what made this even greater was what happened the day after that- NOTHING! As they were accustomed to doing, some of them went out the following morning to pick the manna that God had given them from heaven for forty years. But on that morning when they went out they found none. The manna had ceased. Now I'm sure some of them got anxious but when they stopped and thought about it God's message was clear: They didn't need it any more, they were now standing in God's promise and His provision was readily available.

Please open your Bibles again to 1 Corinthians 5:7-8...

I hope you can already see the connection. With Jesus as our Passover, God wants us to enjoy His provision and not this world's provision. The leaven of this world is described as malice and wickedness. Malice is hurting others for personal benefit and wickedness is doing what we know to be wrong for personal satisfaction. That's the way this world operates. God wants us to be separated from that so we might enjoy the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. That's His provision. To live without hypocrisy and to live in the light of what He says is right.

We cannot go into this building and expect to succeed the world's way. There is always the temptation to mimic what the world does in order to have their kind of success, but I

hope you have already decided that's not what you want for yourself or for our church. The deceit and self-serving ways of our world have no business among God's people. And how silly it is to even try it that way when God has so much more for us. Ephesians 1:3 teaches He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Ephesians 3:20 takes it even further, He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think!

As we move forward, let's do so with God's provision.

#### **Reminder # 4 – Sword / God's Protection**

In verses 13-15 Joshua personally received a very special reminder that of a sword, meant to remind Him of God's protection. Look at verses 13-15...

Joshua left camp to go for a walk. He went to look over Jericho. Apparently he was anxious about the challenge ahead. You can understand that can't you? In his might it looked impossible and probably was.

As Joshua stood looking over Jericho he looked up and there was a man standing opposite him with his sword drawn. Joshua didn't recognize him at first and that kind of surprises me. In Joshua 1:9 the Lord had promised to be with him wherever he went. But hasn't the same thing happened to you? You were worried about something and looking for direction from God only to suddenly realize He was there with you all along.

This man with the sword was not an ordinary man. Notice in verse 14... Then in verse 15... And then in 6:2...

Most believe this was a theophany. A theophany is an appearance of Christ before His incarnation in the Old Testament. The appearance of our Lord at this time to Joshua was meant to serve a very specific purpose. It is found in His answer to Joshua in verse 14. Joshua asked him, *whose side are you on theirs or ours?* He answered...

Here's what Joshua was doing: he was making Jericho his battle. Isn't that what we do all the time. I know I sure do.

God changed Joshua's perspective. He reminded him it was not his battle but the Lord's.

We need to remember that. As we face our opportunity it will be a mixture of blessing and challenge. Before rushing in, or trying to take it on our own, let's slow down long enough to remember God's involvement.

It is His promise, His deliverance, His provision, and His protection that has gotten us this far and will take us the rest of the way. Please, let's not run ahead of Him alone. Let's remember His involvement. And let's continue to depend upon Him not only for ourselves but also for our church that we might fully enjoy the opportunity He has put before us.