

Spiritual Preparations (Part 2): Joshua 5:10-15

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This morning we're going to look at the second half of Joshua 5. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, and then will come Good Friday and Easter. My plan for those 3 services is to turn our attention to the Gospels. Next week we'll reflect on the events of Palm Sunday – Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And then on Good Friday we'll meditate on Jesus' death on the cross. And on Easter Sunday we'll rejoice in the miraculous and marvelous event of His resurrection. That's what we'll be focusing on for the next couple weeks, and then we'll resume our study of Joshua.

Joshua 5, as we studied last Sunday and will continue to today, is about spiritual preparations that happen just prior to the start of the conquest. Israel is in the land, but they have not yet defeated their enemies. Their first battle is imminent, but it's as though there's a pause in the story for Israel to consecrate themselves unto the Lord.

We saw this last week, in the first half of chapter 5, in the act of circumcision. Those who had been born in the wilderness had not been circumcised. And yet circumcision was a sign of the covenant. It marked God's people as His own. It had great spiritual significance for the descendants of Abraham.

So before the battles begin, the Lord instructs Joshua to stop and circumcise all the males of the younger generation because they had not been circumcised in the wilderness. This is part of their spiritual preparations.

In the second half of chapter 5, which we're going to focus on now, there are 2 more very significant events that occur during this brief time while Israel is camped out at Gilgal, in between the Jordan River and Jericho. They've crossed the Jordan. Jericho is near at hand. And it's at this time that the Lord stops them and leads them in these memorable events which will prepare their hearts for what is to come. As I said last week, this would seem to be a very inopportune time to stop. They can't retreat. Their enemies are scared. It would seem to be a very good time to attack. But instead they are told to circumcise the whole army, which would make them vulnerable. This strategy doesn't make any sense from a human standpoint.

What we're going to see, though, is the commander of the Lord's army who will go before Israel and give Jericho into their

hands. The people are being prepared spiritually for the conquest that lies ahead. The main task for them at this point is not sharpening their swords or spears or mending their shields and armor. It's spiritual preparation that is most important. They need to know, more than anything else, that they belong to the Lord. He is One who delivered them out of Egypt and promised to take them into the new land He had for them. And He reassures them, especially their leader Joshua, that He is with them and will fight for them.

Let's start in verses 10-12 looking at the Passover, and then we'll move to verses 13-15 about the commander of the Lord's army. Under those 2 larger headings, I'll have a total of 5 subheadings which are all statements about the Lord. The Lord delivers. The Lord provides. The Lord speaks. The Lord fights. The Lord is worthy of worship.

The Passover

I said some things about the Passover 2 weeks ago when we were studying Joshua 4 about remembering God's faithfulness. The Passover was a memorial for Israel, and that meal foreshadowed the Lord's Supper, which is a meal of remembrance for the church today.

I'm not going to repeat what I said 2 weeks ago. I do want to say some additional things about the Passover meal, specifically what it would have meant to Israel on this occasion as they were ending their 40 years in the wilderness.

This brings us to the first subheading:

The Lord Delivers

Remember the first Passover? What did that meal signify for the people of Israel? What event did it correspond to? Well, it was tied with the 10th and final plague that came upon Egypt—the death of all the firstborn. The Israelites were graciously spared. The Lord had told them to observe this Passover meal which included the killing of a year old lamb without blemish. And they were to put the blood of that lamb on their doorposts. And the Lord, seeing the blood, passed over their houses, not striking down their firstborn.

But Pharaoh and all Egypt experienced the terror of this plague. They all lost their firstborn. And that's what prompted Pharaoh to tell Moses and Aaron, "Go! Get your people out of here!"

It was through these plagues, and climactically through this 10th and final plague, that the Lord delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt. So as they celebrate this meal together, they are remembering specifically the Lord's deliverance. They were delivered from God's wrath, which they deserved. The blood of the lamb shielded them from destruction. And they were delivered out of bondage under Pharaoh.

In Joshua 5 we have one verse that simply tells us the Israelites kept the Passover. But what a meaningful meal that would have been. We're told there in verse 10 that they observed this on the 14th day of the month in the evening, which is exactly when they had been instructed to do this. Exodus 12:3 says that on the 10th day of the first month they were to take a lamb, and then in verse 6 of Exodus 12 it says that on the 14th day they were to take those lambs and kill them at twilight.

We find out in Joshua 4:19 that it was the 10th day of the first month that the people came up out of the Jordan. And then, as we're reading in Joshua 5:10, it was on the 14th day in the evening that they kept the Passover. This is an indication of the younger generation's obedience to the Lord, at least at this point.

There's one other account of Israel observing the Passover during their wilderness wanderings. They were instructed to observe this every year, but we're not told if that happened or not. We do read in Numbers 9 of the Lord telling them to keep the Passover. That was during their 2nd year in the wilderness.

But it's interesting to think about Exodus 12, the first Passover, and Joshua 5, the first Passover in the Promised Land, as bookends to the wilderness wanderings. The first Passover was on the eve of the exodus out of Egypt. They ate the Passover meal, and then soon crossed through the waters of the Red Sea. The Passover we're reading about in Joshua 5 is associated with a kind of second exodus. They have just "escaped," as it were, from the wilderness and have passed through the waters of the Jordan River.

The Lord delivers His people and brings them into the home He has prepared for them. The Passover meal was a tangible way for God's people to be reminded of that.

The Lord Provides

The other thing we see in verses 10-12 of Joshua 5 is that the Lord provides. Verses 11-12 tell us of the transition from the way the Lord provided for them in the wilderness to the way He

was going to provide for them now that they were in the Promised Land.

Let's rewind 40 years and remember for a moment the situation when God began the daily manna. This is in Exodus 16. In Exodus 15 Moses leads the people in singing a song of praise to God for delivering them from Egypt.

Read Ex 15:1-3, 20-21

What a great scene that is! Singing and dancing, celebrating what the Lord had done. But in the very next paragraph the people are grumbling about the water. That's at the end of Exodus 15. And then at the beginning of Exodus 16 the people are grumbling about their lack of food.

What's so amazing about God's grace to His people is that in spite of their complaining He still provides for their needs. That's when the Lord began to rain down bread from heaven—daily bread for His people. That's how He sustained them throughout those 40 years in the wilderness.

So this is quite a monumental transition that we're reading of in Joshua 5 when the manna ceases. But notice it's not a bad thing at all that the manna ceases. God is not punishing them by withdrawing the manna. This is not a sad thing that the manna stops. Rather, it's a time of promises being fulfilled. Now they are finally going to enjoy the plenty of this Promised Land. The land of milk and honey that they've hearing about, now they finally get to taste it. And I'm sure they enjoyed the variety. I imagine there's only so many ways you can fix manna. They would have been excited to have many ingredients now to choose from. It's true, their meals didn't fall right out of the sky anymore, but the selection would be a welcome change.

This transition makes me think of the different ways that God provides for us, and how His means of provision can change from one season of life to another. I think back to my first couple decades of life and how God provided for my needs through my parents. For instance . . . my mom's a great cook, and she made sure that we had good, healthy meals every day. I would come to the table, and there was food there . . . like it had dropped out of the sky. I had very little to do with it getting there. I just showed up and ate. (I usually helped with the cleanup, and I had various chores to do on a regular basis, but I hadn't earned the money to pay for the groceries—my dad had done that—and I hadn't done the grocery shopping or meal planning or cooking—my mom had

done that). God was providing for me in that way during that season of life.

Then I went to college and I was on the meal plan in the cafeteria. I walked in, and there was food there. I ate my fill, dropped off my tray at the conveyer belt that went back to the kitchen, and I headed off to my next class or activity, or to the library to study. That was another amazing provision.

And then there was a season in between the meal plan and marriage that was kind of rough. I wouldn't have lasted as a single man very long. I was living in the 3rd floor bedroom in the home of one of the music minister's at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. We were close to downtown Minneapolis, and I didn't own a car. I walked to the church building where I was doing an apprenticeship program and taking ministry classes. I walked to work. And many of my meals consisted of canned goods I bought at the convenience store that I would walk past each day. God was still providing. But it was different than how He provided before that and after that.

For the past 15 years I've been enjoying the very nice meals that Stacy plans and prepares for our family. But this is a different season, too, unlike my childhood years, because now I'm the one responsible to work hard and budget wisely so that there's money to buy the groceries. And I help out with various things in the home so that Stacy can get groceries and prepare our meals. And I even do some cooking, myself, from time to time. I have a small repertoire of meals that I can prepare.

God provides . . . in different ways at different times. And we can think of many facets of life, not just food. I choose food because the text is talking about food. But you can think also of friendships. There are certain friendships that come and go. Hopefully some friendships last a long, long time. But there may also be friendships that God provides for a certain season that is just what you need to get you through a particular time of trial or temptation. I think of friendships I had in college that were so spiritually encouraging to me. I'm grateful to God for putting those men in my life. Most of those guys I don't keep in touch with today. But I can still look back and thank God for providing those friendships at that critical time in life.

You could think, too, of God's provision of Bible teachers and preachers and writers and spiritual mentors. I think of some of the Christian authors I read in high school and preachers I listened to and even my own pastor. They all played such a profound role in spurring me on in my relationship with the Lord. For the most

part, those authors and preachers are not the ones I'm learning from today. As my theological perspective has developed over the years I look back and realize I now have some significant disagreements with many of those teachers. But that doesn't diminish the fact that God provided spiritual nourishment for my soul through those books and sermons and ministries during that season of life. And I'm so grateful for that.

As you reflect on your own life, and the changing seasons of your life, meditate on God's provision for you—physically, emotionally, relationally, spiritually. Give thanks to God. He provides for His children so graciously. He provides creatively, in unique ways and in changing ways as He guides us through the changing seasons of our lives.

The Commander of the Lord's Army

Next, let's talk about Joshua's encounter with this mysterious stranger. This is really a remarkable event. It's hard to imagine the emotional rollercoaster this must have been for Joshua. Just think of him walking near Jericho. Maybe he was thinking and praying, scoping things out. At this particular moment his eyes may have been down toward the ground. Maybe he was deep in contemplation. And then he lifts his eyes and is startled to discover that he is not alone. There's a man standing there. And not just any man, a man with a sword, with a drawn sword. Joshua doesn't back down, though. He doesn't cower in fear. He doesn't run away. Instead, he approaches the man and asks him a question.

“Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” His question could also be understood in this way, “Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?” To which the man responds, “No (or neither—I don't fit either category); but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.”

Just to be clear, in case it isn't already obvious . . . this mysterious stranger is no mere man. In fact, He is none other than the Lord Himself appearing in human form. There are other interactions like this in the Old Testament. In Genesis 3, right after the Fall, we read that the Lord God was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man . . .”

In Genesis 18 we read that “the Lord appeared to [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and

behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth . . .”

Then there’s that strange encounter that Jacob had in the middle of the night by the Jabbok River. In Genesis 32 it says that “a man wrestled with [Jacob] until the breaking of the day.” And Jacob said, “I will not let you go until you bless me.” And that’s when the Lord changed Jacob’s name to Israel.

Some would interpret these appearances of the Lord as appearances of the pre-Incarnate Christ. In other words, this is God in the flesh, and therefore it would make sense to view these encounters as encounters with the Second Person of the Trinity who is somehow appearing in the flesh long before He actually comes to earth in the events we read about in the New Testament. I’m sympathetic with that view. It does make sense. However, we don’t have any verse that explicitly tells us this is the pre-Incarnate Christ. So we can’t be dogmatic about it.

What we can see for sure is that this individual who appears to Joshua is divine. Indeed, He is the Lord. Joshua appropriately bows down and worships Him. And the Lord speaks to Joshua.

The Lord Speaks

This is the first thing I want to reflect on briefly in this part of our passage. The Lord speaks. It’s an amazing mercy of God that He speaks to His people. What an encouragement this would have been to Joshua. This was a huge part of God spiritually preparing His people, preparing the leader, for what was going to be happening in the coming days. Joshua needed this confirmation and encouragement to know that the Lord was with him. The Lord was with His people. And the Lord gave Joshua that confirmation by appearing to him and speaking to him.

Notice some things about the brief dialogue that’s recorded here for us. First Joshua asks a question and the Lord reveals His identity. He is the commander of the army of the Lord. Then, in response to that revelation, Joshua falls on his face to worship. And Joshua’s next question is a request for further revelation. “What does my lord say to his servant?” Joshua humbles himself in worship, acknowledges that he is the Lord’s servant, and asks the Lord to tell him what to do. And the first thing the Lord tells him to do is take off his sandals because this is holy ground. The Lord reveals His holiness.

If we ignore the chapter division (which we need to do sometimes), we read on and see that the Lord continues to speak to Joshua in 6:2-5, giving him specific instructions concerning Jericho.

It is no small thing that a holy God will stoop to our level to communicate with us. Don't ever take this Book (the Bible) for granted. The Lord speaks! He has spoken to us. He has spoken to us in the Living Word, His own Son Jesus Christ who came and lived among us on this earth. And He has spoken to us in the written Word, the Bible.

Last weekend in our Ministry of Worship class Dr. Don Whitney was talking about the important role of the Word of God in worship. He said, "If you want to hear God speak, read His Word." And then he said, "If you want to hear God speak audibly, read His Word out loud." That makes a good point. We may seek some mystical experience of the Lord's presence. We may yearn for God to reveal Himself in some tangible, miraculous way (and I don't deny that God can do that). But don't ever overlook the tangible, miraculous revelation of God in this Book. The Lord certainly does speak. He spoke to Joshua in a very unique way there on the outskirts of Jericho. He speaks to us today through the pages of Genesis to Revelation. Let's respond like Joshua did, in humble worship and with an eagerness to listen and obey.

The Lord Fights

The next thing to notice about the Lord in this passage is that He is a warrior. The Lord fights. Joshua beholds the Lord with a drawn sword in His hand.

Now put that image together with the following verses from Exodus and Deuteronomy . . .

"The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."
(Exodus 14:14, ESV)

"The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes,"
(Deuteronomy 1:30, ESV)

"And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.'"
(Deuteronomy 20:2-4, ESV)

And what is the next thing that the Lord says to Joshua right here in the context of our passage for this morning? In Joshua 6:2 the Lord says, *“See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.”* (Joshua 6:2, ESV)

The Lord reveals Himself to Joshua here as the commander of the army of the Lord. The word for “army” there is also translated as “hosts.” There are over 250 times in the Old Testament where we read of the “Lord of hosts.” The Lord has a heavenly army, an army of angels who do His bidding.

There’s an event in 2 Kings 6 that gives us a picture of this. Syria was warring against Israel, and the king of Syria was after Elisha the prophet on this occasion because Elisha had miraculously been aware of certain plans that the king of Syria had made. Horses and chariots of Syria surrounded the city where Elisha was. And Elisha’s servant was terrified. But Elisha told him,

“He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:16–17, ESV)

The Lord has an army of heavenly hosts that is far greater in number and power than any other army. We think of the multitude of heavenly host that appeared to the shepherds at the time of Jesus’ birth. What an amazing experience that would have been!

And we think of the commander of the Lord’s army appearing here to Joshua, and the great assurance that would have been to know that the Lord’s army was going to be going before them and fighting on their behalf.

That same Lord is watching over you, too, if you are one of His children. The same Lord who, when He was hanging there on the cross, could have called down an army of angels but didn’t (Matthew 26:53). He remained there on that cross to bear the punishment for our sin. He has won the spiritual battle. He has paid the price to deliver us from our bondage to sin. He is also the One who will return one day with a sword. Interestingly, the apostle John’s vision recorded in the book of Revelation describes a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth (Revelation 1:16; 19:15, 21). He will strike down those who oppose Him. He is the Lord who fights.

And that's why we don't have to fight. Indeed, we must not fight, not against flesh and blood. We're in a different place than Joshua. We're not part of a conquest for a piece of land. I'll talk more in the weeks to come about how to understand the conquest. But let me be clear even now that this book of Joshua cannot be used to justify one nation attacking another for religious reasons. The significance for us is spiritual. It applies to our spiritual battles.

So as you think of the spiritual battles you're facing, remember what Jesus said to His disciples before He departed from this earth. He said to them, and to us, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The Lord, who is mighty in battle, is with us.

The Lord is Worthy of Worship

And this leads to the last point, briefly as we close, that our Lord is worthy of worship. He delivers. He provides. He speaks. He fights. And He is most certainly worthy of our worship. Notice what Joshua does the very moment he realizes the identity of the Person standing before him. As soon as this mysterious stranger announces Himself as the commander of the Lord's army, Joshua falls on his face to the earth and worships.

It was an appropriate reflex on Joshua's part. To stand in the very presence of the Lord is a weighty thing. You don't treat Him casually. You don't act like He's just another one of your buddies. This is THE LORD of the universe! And we have no business speaking to Him or even approaching Him apart from His grace to us.

Joshua receives the exact same instruction that Moses received in Exodus 3. Take off your sandals. You're standing on holy ground. This was a way of impressing upon Joshua (and Moses earlier) that this is not life-as-normal. There's something different about this moment, this conversation.

And that's something we should remember every time we speak to the Lord. Not that we have to live our lives bowed down to the ground. But the posture of our hearts should have an appropriate reverence for the Lord. And there probably should be times when we do physically bow down as we pray. In those moments our physical posture can reflect and reinforce that inward posture of worship.

Worship Him today, worship Him this week, as you meditate on Him delivering you from bondage . . . His provision

for you spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally . . . Him speaking to you in His Word . . . and His power to fight our spiritual enemies. He is our Lord, and He is worthy of our worship.