

Moving Forward Under God's Leadership

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] So we're going to read, first of all, in the New Testament, just a few verses from 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and then into Joshua 5.

1 Corinthians chapter 10. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things, as they did.

And that's in reference to the generation of God's people that lived in Egypt and came out of the land of Egypt, led towards the promised land, but they grumbled, they complained, they wanted to turn back.

And Joshua chapter 5 shows a new generation with a different mindset. So next up, Joshua chapter 5. We'll read the whole chapter.

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.

[1 : 47] 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. All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not.

The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness for 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 that he had solemnly promised their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 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, and after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in the camp until they were healed. Then the Lord said to Joshua, today I have rolled away their approach of Egypt from you.

[2 : 55] So the place has been called Gilgal to this day. 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.

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 down 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. Joshua did so. Amen. This is God's word.

[3 : 56] So continuing in the book of Joshua, which is all about God saving, God leading the people into the promised land. Here we are in Joshua chapter five.

And I want us to think about resetting priorities for the people of God. Perhaps you've heard it said or you've read articles describing 2020, 2021 as the great reset.

That phrase obviously is recognising that in many ways the world has been put on pause. Every area of life has been impacted.

Things have changed in almost unimaginable ways. But there's a recognition in that of an opportunity to reflect and therefore to bring lasting change.

For example, the World Economic Forum has a thing called Reset 2020. And the founder of that says that the pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine and

reset our world.

[5 : 07] And that's in the terms of distribution of wealth and how people do business and those kind of things. Now, come to Joshua chapter five and it begins with a pause.

And it's a pause where the people of God will reflect and they will reset. Who will they follow? How will they relate to God now in the promised land?

This is what's in view in chapter five. And today, that's what we're going to think about for our own context. I love how relevant this is. You know, our church life is in many ways on pause.

It's a time of reset for us. And the question becomes, who will we follow during this phase of our life and in the future? How will we live before God?

So let me suggest this is an opportunity for you and for me. It's an opportunity for us as a church to reflect, to reimagine and to reset and to reset around worshipping and enjoying the glory of God, worshipping and enjoying our glorious saviour Jesus.

[6 : 30] So tonight I have a suggested use for this sermon. And the use I'm going to suggest is that our points this evening become prayer points for the church and the world in 2021.

So you might want to grab a pen, grab a phone, jot some things down so that in our great reset, we may, one, follow the right leader, two, live in covenant relationship, three, celebrate our salvation, and four, worship our Lord and Saviour.

So we're going to see how all of these appear in our text. But before that, we need to set the scene. So the people of God have just set foot. They've just crossed over the river.

They've now entered the promised land. So the promise made to Abraham some 400 and so years before, the promise made to Moses some 40 years before, have now been kept.

And it's interesting that the chapter begins with the impact of God's saving work being seen to affect the nation. So chapter four ends with God having dried up the Red Sea.

[7 : 52] And he did this so that all peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful. And then what do we find in chapter five? When the Canaanite kings heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan, until they crossed over, their hearts melted in fear.

They no longer had the courage to face the Israelites. Why didn't Canaan attack? Well, it's not down to a human factor. It's not the impressiveness of Israel's army. No, it's the Lord's power and awareness of God at work that creates fear.

Now, sadly, unlike Rahab, this doesn't lead the nations towards saving faith. It doesn't lead them to join the people of God. Rather, they continue to oppose God's people and continue to oppose God's purposes.

But here we have the nations in the promised land quaking in their boots. So what would we expect Israel to do? Perhaps we would expect action. Here's the moment.

Terrified enemies. Here's the chance. But they pause. And I want us to think about why they pause and why that matters for us. First reason they pause.

[8 : 58] They pause so that it becomes clear that they will follow the right leader. All through this text, and in many cases through the early chapters of the book of Joshua, the case is being made that Joshua is God's chosen leader, following in the footsteps of Moses.

And we'll see this very clearly. Let's look at this very briefly. So verses two to nine. What do we have there? We have Joshua initiating circumcision, which is a mark of the covenant, covenant renewal.

Now, in Exodus chapter four, what do we have? We have Moses initiating circumcision in his own family. Before he goes back to Egypt, directed by God to lead the people out, he circumcises his son, mark of the covenant.

So Joshua and Moses share that. Verses 10 to 12. What do we have there? We have a Passover meal. Here they are about to enter the promised land.

Exodus 12, as the people are about to go out of Egypt. Moses leads them to celebrate the Passover. With this, people on the march to the promised land, both Moses and Joshua, take time to celebrate God's saving work.

[10 : 11] And then verse 13 to 15. Both have this appearing of the Lord. Famously, Exodus chapter three, Moses meets with God in the burning bush.

And he is told also to take his sandals off because the place where he is standing is holy ground. That both Joshua and Moses meet with God and worship God. So there is no doubt in our text, Joshua is God's appointed leader.

And what we see him doing is leading the people in faith and obedience. And as he does so, he is anticipating for us a greater Joshua.

Jesus. Both mean God saves. And as if to make that plain and evident to us, verses 13 to 15 show us that Joshua is not the ultimate leader of the people of God, of the army of God.

The Lord is. Jesus is. And what do we know about Jesus? Jesus is the one who has been sent by the father who comes to establish the new covenant with his people at the cross through his body and his blood broken and shed for us.

[11 : 27] So that our sin might be dealt with. So that we might have peace with God and be brought into relationship. Jesus is the true Passover lamb, to use the language of John chapter 1.

And that Jesus comes. And again, it's his blood shed that covers our sin and our guilt and establishes our redemption, our freedom from slavery to sin to become the people of God.

And of course, Jesus, remarkably, being fully human, is a faithful worshipper himself. We see that all through the Gospels.

But as fully God, he is also the one who receives, rightfully receives worship as God. So it is vital then that as a church, we must follow Jesus as Lord.

We must be led by him. So we think about how to pray. Pray that the leaders of your church would humbly serve under Jesus as Lord and that we would faithfully point to Jesus as Lord.

[12 : 45] And pray for one another and pray for new people to be part of our church who would gladly follow Jesus as leader and as Lord in our lives.

So in this great reset, they pause so they will follow the right leader. In this pause secondly, they pause so that they would live in covenant relationship with their God.

Verses 2 to 9 is all about this. In this great reset, the current generation, Joshua's generation, they want to break with the past. They don't want to follow the negative pattern of the generation that came out of Egypt.

And the sign of this is that they take the covenant sign and they are circumcised. Now why circumcision? Well circumcision from Genesis 17 was God's appointed sign for how a person would be identified as one of God's people.

Now it's striking that the generation that came out of Egypt, they had been circumcised but they failed to circumcise the next generation. In many ways speaks to their spiritual condition.

[14 : 04] They thought little of what it meant to be in covenant with God. What it meant that God had acted to bring them out of slavery. A sign of their spiritual state that they were cut off from God.

But this generation, they want to be different. They want to be obedient to God's command. Verse 6 makes clear that the generation that left Egypt had not obeyed the law.

Lord, they had been unfaithful. This generation, they want to live in covenant with God and they know that that requires their obedience.

If they want to enjoy blessing, if they want to enjoy life in the promised land with God, they need to be obedient on one sign of obedience is taking the sign that God commanded for them, which is circumcision.

At this point, maybe it's worth issuing a warning. In the same way as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 10. And the warning from this generation that came out of Egypt is this.

[15 : 10] It is entirely possible to have the marks of the privileges of being part of the people of God, but not to have a heart that loves and submits to the Lord as God.

Coming to church, being raised in a Christian family, having the Bible that we can read. These things are good, but they do not save.

We need to have a heart that's right with the Lord our God. And that was the problem for the previous generation. But this generation under Joshua, they want circumcision as a sign that they are trusting in God's promise.

So back when God introduced the covenant sign of circumcision, Genesis 17 verse 4, he said, The whole land of Canaan I will give as an everlasting possession to Abraham and to those coming after him.

And then he was told you must keep the covenant. And how was he to keep the covenant? Well, one way was to be circumcised and for his family to be circumcised.

[16 : 24] And again, this is different to the generation that came out of Egypt who disobeyed. And so it says in verse 6, The Lord had sworn to them that they would not see the land.

They had forfeited the right to God's promise. But God's promise would not fail. And this generation, trusting in God's promise, would receive the promised land.

One last reason why they are circumcised. It's a sign of covenant renewal. After they're circumcised, verse 9, The Lord said to Joshua, Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.

And again, a deliberate contrast with the generation coming out of Egypt. That reproach was their disobedience. Their shame was their disobedience.

And because of that disobedience, they would not, they did not enter the promised land. But now, this generation, They want a right relationship. We see covenant renewal.

[17 : 24] And so they will go on to enjoy the blessing of God in the promised land for so long as they are obedient. So they pause before taking the land.

They don't want to go a step further without being in a right relationship with their God. They want to enjoy life with him in the promised land. The story of Israel and their God.

Imagine a marriage. A marriage where failure has come on one part and it's brought into the home silence. And it's brought distance and it's brought distress.

We know that sin and failure can cause that. Well, imagine that the party that had done the wrong, Being totally committed to restoration.

To enjoy relationship again. To pursue that reconciliation. So what we see in the hearts of Joshua and the generation that are about to enter the promised land.

[18 : 28] They want to enjoy life with God. Here's how we can pray. Pray for ourselves. Pray for others.

Pray for our church. That we would guard our hearts. That we would pursue obedience. That we wouldn't be like the generation in Egypt. That we're so quick to turn to idols.

So quick to turn to grumbling and complaining and turn their backs on God. That we would want to live in obedience and to follow him. And to pray that we too would value life with God as what's first and best to us.

In all the chaos and confusion. That one solid foundation that would remain. That we have eternal life with God through Jesus our Saviour. And we would hold on to that as precious.

And that we would then value those visible signs of belonging. One of the visible signs of belonging in a church was church membership.

[19 : 29] Where we publicly identify. These are my people. I'm going to live out my faith with these people. I'm going to share my spiritual gifts with them. We're going to encourage and speak the truth and care for one another together.

Baptism. Another sign. Publicly identifying Jesus as Lord. Being part of a particular group of God's people.

That belonging would be important because it would be a sign of belonging to the Lord Jesus. That we'd be strengthened in our commitment to him.

And that would strengthen as well our commitment to one another. A third reason why there is this pause. Is so that the people of God might celebrate a redemption.

Celebrate salvation. We see that in verses 10 to 12. It's all about the Passover. Now two brief observations about the Passover. Here again Joshua.

[20 : 35] Their spiritual leader is looking to establish what we might call a gospel culture for them. Where they're remembering with thanksgiving. That God is the one who has saved them.

That God has been good to them. So the Passover celebrates God's grace. It was intended as a sign to mark that.

In Exodus 12 and verse 27. We're invited to imagine a child and a future generation saying. Dad, why are we eating this Passover meal?

And the answer given is. It's a Passover sacrifice to the Lord. Who passed over the houses of the Israelites and spared our homes when he struck Egypt.

It was a celebration that instead of receiving the just judgment of God. Because Israel were sinful every bit as much as the Egyptians. We are sinful as much as anybody else.

[21 : 31] It's a celebration that instead of judgment we receive from God. But mercy and grace. Through the sacrifice that he provided. Another observation about the Passover is that the meal celebrates the fulfillment of God's promise.

Again Exodus 13 verse 5 as the Passover is instituted the very first time. It says when the Lord brings you into the land. The land where they now are.

Observe this ceremony. So here they are. They have now set foot in the promised land. First thing they want to do. When they are able. When they've been prepared. Is to celebrate the Passover.

There's a really interesting detail in verses 10 to 12. Did you notice it about the change of diet. For 40 years they've been eating manna. God's supernaturally providing for them.

But now in verse 12. The manna stopped the day after. They ate this food. There was no longer any manna. But that year they ate the produce. Part of the promise was they would be entering a land flowing with milk and honey.

[22 : 35] A fertile place where God would provide for them in the ordinary means. Through agriculture. And here they are enjoying God's promise. Expressed in their diet. When I think about this.

I think about family life. Family life in many ways is shaped by celebrations. This is our calendar. Marked by times where we celebrate birthdays.

We celebrate anniversaries. We celebrate times where we get together. When you think about a family table. When there are special occasions. When lots of us are gathered together.

What do we do? We share a meal. Yes, but we're also sharing memories. And we're looking back with joy. And joy is just as important for us today in the church.

To be people who celebrate. To celebrate God's grace. To celebrate God's salvation. So pray for us as a church.

[23 : 35] That our weekly worship. And in the fullness of time. The Lord's Supper. They would be times for us to rehearse. To remind ourselves.

And to celebrate God's saving grace. As we've come to know it. In and through Jesus our Lord. Who lived that perfect life. That we could never live.

Who died in our place. For our sins. For our sins. So that by trusting in him. We might receive salvation. And be part of the people of God. That we would focus on the gospel.

We'd remind ourselves of the gospel. Every week. Every time we gather as the people of God. Whether that's online. Whether that's in a church building. Whether that's in a home.

That we'd remind ourselves of the gospel. That that would keep us on our march. As pilgrims towards our promised land. Our home in glory.

[24 : 31] Pray for a faith. That we'd look backward and look forward. That we'd look back to the cross. And the empty tomb. With thanksgiving. For the victory of Jesus.

For that freedom that we enjoy. And we'd look forward. That heaven would be our true home. That if anything. This pandemic would remind us. Not to hold on too tightly.

Look to the things of this world. Because everything. Disappears in the end. Except for. Our faith. Our hope. And our love. Let's make heaven our true home. And let's share together that reality.

That Jesus is our Passover lamb. He is our redemption.

The judgment of God has passed over us. Because it has fallen on Jesus. Jesus is God's provision for us.

[25 : 29] And he is that promise. Every time we. The people of God ate the Passover. Every time we eat the Lord's Supper. There is that promise of more to come.

There is. The new heavens and the new earth. And the wedding supper of the lamb. And so we anticipate. More joy. And more glory. To follow.

One last important reason. For this pause. For this reset. They reset. So they might worship.

The Lord. So up until this point. Joshua. Is spiritual leader. He takes the initiative. He leads them towards obedience. But now. Verses 13 to 15.

What becomes clear. Is the Lord is the leader. And the battle is his. Now what do we learn. About the Lord. From this figure that we meet. In verses 13 to 15. First thing we need to see.

[26 : 29] Is that the Lord is. A warrior. Verse 13. Joshua saw a man. With a drawn sword. In his hand. And he is the commander. Of the army of the Lord.

Now that. In a sense. Was Joshua's position. But as soon as he meets. This figure. He knows that he deserves. The greater honour. And so he wants to listen to him. And he looks to him.

For instruction. He is encouraged. To trust. Remember. Back in Joshua. Chapter 1. There was this wonderful promise.

