"The Trustworthiness of Godly Wisdom" Joshua 5:1-12

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[0:00] A dear friend of mine tells a story about how, as a twenty-something, he found himself at a crossroads.! His career was doing well, although it was extremely demanding and it tempted him here and there at a bit of moral compromise.

A lot of grey area that maybe wasn't so grey that he was tempted to participate in. There's also the prospect of a very meaningful romantic relationship, but with someone who did not share the same faith.
Many things were going well. For my friend, the conventionally wise thing to do would be to go for it. To go for it. These are great opportunities. Go for it.
But it would ultimately mean compromising his commitment to his faith. My friend shares how he wrestled with the question about whether God would honour his decision to not compromise his faith, even if it meant saying no to many good things. Many great opportunities.
Quite the fork in the road moment. You know, one of the biggest struggles that Christians, people that maybe have a foot in and foot out of the Christian faith, or those that are spiritually interested and are looking to see whether the Christian faith would be the right move for them.
[1:31] One of the biggest issues is this. If I get serious about this faith, will I have to give up much more of what I love and enjoy?

Will my life be more or less robust? Can God truly give what this faith promises? And I'll say this. It's a good question to ask if you're asking the question, if you have asked that question.
It's a very good question to ask. Why? Because it's an honest question. It's a question that recognizes that the Christian faith makes claims on all areas of your life.
It has implications. It recognizes that we are taking a chance by trusting in the biblical claims of the God of Scripture.
Is Christianity worth the cost? So we're going to continue on in Joshua 5 as we think that over. We're going to read through the, continue to read through this story of Israel in the land, in the promised land.
[2:41] And we'll find that the Israelites are in a situation not so dissimilar from the situation that my friend found himself in. A situation that seems to go against conventional wisdom.

That calls into question God's faithfulness to his promises. Will he provide for Israel even if it seems like following him might result in their downfall?
So to explore this question, we'll look at Joshua 5 verses 1 to 12. Not the whole chapter. It's interesting how the chapter is divided up.
Really the last few verses of chapter 5, it goes better with chapter 6. So that's the way I've broken it up. So to explore this question, we'll look at chapter 5, 1 to 12.
And we'll look at two rituals that are described in the text. So the first one is a ritual act. And the other one is a ritual meal.
[3:43] And just before we get into these two points, let's consider where we are in the narrative thus far. So if you are new or you haven't followed along in Joshua, let me bring you up to speed. Last week we were in Joshua 3 to 4.

And there is so much to say about it. But the broad strokes are that Israel, they have received the report from the spies that went into the land.
And the report is a good report. The people are afraid of this nation that is amassed on the east side of the Jordan. And now chapters 3 and 4, they will begin to cross the Jordan.

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And they cross the Jordan in a very supernatural way during the flood season. Which is to say, without a supernatural way to get over the Jordan, they would have to wait some time until the flooding subsided.
But yet, God does a miracle. He enters into his natural world and he does a supernatural thing. He holds up the Jordan, the waters up north, so that by the time all of the excess water flows down, the Jordan is dry and the entire nation crosses it.
[4:55] The nations that inhabited the land, they continue to be absolutely frightened.

They knew that the God of Israel was the only true God. There is this interesting, if you read the end of chapter 4 and chapter 5, there is a bit of a seamlessness in the narrative that Israel is poised to unsheathe their sword, take military control and win the day, to have a conquest of the land.
See if you can see the transition. It goes really well. We will start in chapter 4, 23. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over.
So that, this is verse 24, So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.
Chapter 5, verse 1. As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.
[6:22] This is it. Israel is in such an advantageous position. They crossed the Jordan in a miraculous way. Their enemies are completely demoralized. Completely demoralized.

Now is the time to strike. So what happens next? Look with me at verses 2 and 3, and this will begin our first question. Verse 2 and 3 of chapter 5.
At that time the Lord said to Joshua, Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time. So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gebeat Har-erloth.
And that's, oh, and then I'll read verse 8. Sorry about that. Verse 8. When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.
On the eve of Israel's greatest victory, okay, the greatest victory, their enemies completely demoralized, the promise-making, promise-keeping God, pumps the brakes on the whole operation.
[7:27] And it's a bizarre kind of turn of events. Now is the time to strike. Conventional wisdom says everything is going their way.

This is the time. The strategy couldn't be better. The situation couldn't be better. And God says to Joshua, hold on a second. Make some flint knives and circumcise the people.
And by the way, you'll have to wait a good amount of time until they're all healed up. It's like the worst possible time to do this. It is strategically idiotic.
Every man between the ages of 8 and 40, the whole generation that was born in the wilderness, had to be circumcised on the moment of their greatest conquest.
It's a remarkable, remarkable tension in the story. I mean, I can imagine hearing the murmuring in the camp. Sorry? What's going on? Can this not wait until we have the upper hand, until we conquer the land?
[8:30] This is the worst possible time. And even worse if the murmuring was like this. I mean, is Joshua really hearing from the Lord? Does this make sense that God would make this promise and then on the eve of our victory, we are going to be completely vulnerable?

It makes no sense. Is Joshua the right leader for us? Maybe Moses was our guy in the end. Maybe this Joshua guy is a bit cuckoo. He's a bit crazy.
Whether or not that happened, I mean, this is what I'm reading into it or imagining it to happen. But nevertheless, you can feel the tension of what's happening here.
Conventional wisdom says that Israel is acting completely unwise. But what we see here is not unwise at all.
Even if it does fly in the face of conventional wisdom. Listen to the explanation as to why this had to happen at the moment that it had to happen.
[9:34] Look with me at verse 4 and we'll read to verse 7. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them. All the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war had died in the wilderness on the way after they came out of Egypt.

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Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised.
For the people of Israel walked 40 years in the wilderness until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished. Because they did not obey the voice of the Lord.
The Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us. A land flowing with milk and honey.
So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way.
[10:39] You see the Exodus story was not just about God freeing the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. It wasn't just a rescue mission.

But it was about inheriting a promise that God gave centuries earlier. That he would bring the descendants of Abraham into a land that was a promised land. That a land that was flowing with milk and honey.
That it would be a land that would flourish and that they would flourish as a people as a result. That they wouldn't be a grouping of random tribes, but actually they would become a nation under God.
A nation with a land. They would be inheritors of a covenant. And this covenant was the one that the Lord made. And ultimately the covenant pointed to this reality.
That God would be the God to the people of Israel. And the people of Israel would be the people to the one true God. There would be an incredible relational dynamic.
[11:46] I mean, if you're trying to figure out what the big thrust of the Abrahamic covenant is. It is God connecting, choosing a people and connecting with them.

Initiating a relationship with them. This is what the covenant was. So to rescue these people out of Egyptian slavery. It wasn't, again, just to rescue them out of slavery.
But to bring them into this wonderful, loving, God-initiated covenant relationship. But to enjoy the covenant, the people had to walk in the covenant.
For the first generation, even though they were freed by God from Egyptian slavery. It was very clear that they did not want this relational connection, commitment to the Lord.
I'm not going to read it now. But if you read the Apostle Paul's interpretation or explanation of this in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. In verses 1 to 7, 1 to 5, 1 to 7.
[12:53] You will see that the people, they enjoyed being free. But they did not want to submit to the one true God. They didn't want the king.

They only wanted the kingdom. They didn't want the covenant giver. They only wanted the benefits of the covenant. And that entire generation, they were left in the desert to wander until they died.
This generation, they are not like the other generation. Even if it meant effectively ruling out conventional wisdom in favor of faithfulness to the Lord.
And his call to covenant renewal. And that's exactly what we see here. The people of Israel, under Joshua, are renewing the covenant with God. The sign of the covenant being circumcision.
They cannot enjoy the benefits of the covenant unless they renew it themselves. Maybe put it another way. An uncircumcised Israel cannot inherit the land.
[14:01] Before we continue, I just want to say this. We should affirm that conventional wisdom is a good thing. It's a good thing. It's a wise thing to take advantage of good opportunities afforded to you.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the advantageous position where we can strike while the iron's hot, so to speak. We have investment opportunities. We have opportunities to get promotions.
To take chances on a bigger home. To move into a different neighborhood.
To take on opportunities for our children. There's so many aspects of conventional wisdom that are wise. It's good.
It's conventional wisdom. It's still wisdom. However, it ceases to be wise when taking such chances will come at a moral or relational cost.
[15:05] It ceases to be wise if you choose not to stick your head out and speak out about something that is legitimately wrong at work. Something that is morally corrupt. Or even evil.

It is not wise to compromise financially. To, you know, fudge numbers a little bit so you can save yourself a bit more money at tax time.
It is not wise to make decisions that will draw you away from God's people on a consistent basis.

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Where you are not interacting and fellowshipping with people that will pray for you and hold you to account and ask how your soul is doing.
There are many decisions that we can make that seem conventionally wise. But in the end, they're actually compromised. And this was the decision before the Israelites.
[16:04] They seem to be going against conventional wisdom by not striking the Canaanites right away. However, in this case, conventional wisdom was not true wisdom.

For it would not be a decision that was ultimately fueled by faith and trust in the one true covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. Instead of embracing conventional wisdom, they decide to trust in the ever-living God.
To put their faith and hope in Him. To recognize that He wants to be their God and they have this great privilege of being His people. You see, walking in the fullness of wisdom meant walking in the fullness of covenant relationship.
Which meant ultimately being circumcised, bearing the mark of the covenant. The sign of the covenant that the Lord instituted all the way back with Abraham.
The men had to be circumcised. They had to bear the mark of the covenant. It reminded them and reminded their families that God had made a promise to their forefather.
[17:18] That He would give them the land. That they would be His people. They had to fulfill this requirement of the covenant. Even if it meant being at a military disadvantage. I mean, here they are.

The vast majority of the men. Maybe all of the men. They are ready to fight. And yet, there is this kind of fear.
Maybe, maybe, maybe, as we are healing up, maybe the Canaanites are healing up. Maybe they are bolstering their morale once again.
Maybe they are organizing. Maybe they are fortifying. Maybe they are amassing troops just around the bend. Maybe behind that hill. Will God honor our decision?
The previous generation would have given in to these fears. Remember, they wanted the promised land without the promise maker.
[18:22] But this generation is different. They are trusting in the Lord. And again, we will see in weeks to come, it is not a perfect trust. By no means is it a perfect trust.

Nevertheless, their faith is in the God of Israel. And what is the result of all this? Look with me at verse 9. And the Lord said to Joshua, Today, I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day, which is to say, to roll. It is named after what God had done. He has rolled away the reproach of Egypt from the people.
The reproach of Egypt is no longer. The slavery, the taunts, the ridicule, the fear that God would abandon them. The disobedience and disbelief of the previous generation.
The sinfulness of desiring the kingdom without the king. The promised land without the promise maker. All of that has been rolled away so that they are now made righteous by faith in the God of Israel.
[19:31] Israel once again has inherited the covenant promises of God. It is a beautiful, beautiful line. Verse 9. God has rolled away the reproach of Egypt.

Friends, the Lord wants to bless. This is what he is about. He wants to bless. And he wants to bless you. Okay? You.
He wants to bless you. He wants to bless you with joy. He wants to bless you so that you would know love. And the joy of giving love. To grow in virtue.
He wants to bless you with that. He wants to bless you with learning how to work hard and to bless your children. And how to be a good employee or an integral business person.
He wants you to walk wisely in all the areas of this life. These are all blessings he wants to give you. But above all, okay? Above all, God wants to bless you with himself.
[20:30] With himself. Ultimately, the gift of the promised land isn't the land itself. It's God. It's him. Now, he will dwell with him, his people.

And this is the same God that we read about in Joshua. It's the same God that dwells among us right now. He wants to bless you with himself.
He wants you to learn to walk by faith and not by sight. To walk in the fullness of being a member of God's covenantal family.
Which means valuing the things that God values. Valuing the reality that nice things are nice.

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They're great and wonderful. But valuing the reality that now we are the possession of God. And he's happy about it.
[21:29] He delights in it. Right? So how does God do this? Well, the same way he does it for Israel. He rolls away the reproach of Egypt.

Now, we are not slaves or former slaves of the Pharaoh. The Pharaohs haven't existed for millennia. So, how does God roll away the reproach of our Egypt?
Well, he does so by redeeming us from slavery. Not to Pharaoh, but to sin and to death. By removing all that separates us from God. A sinful man from a holy God.
But we must embrace the reality by accepting his salvation by faith. By faith. That means we must inherit the promises of the covenant. And like the Israelites, we have been given a sign of the covenant.
Now, it is no longer circumcision for the people of God in the church. Baptism now is the sign of the new covenant. Baptism, although it is much more than just a reminder that God has washed away our sins, it is not less than that.
[22:42] Like circumcision, it is a memorial to what God has supernaturally done for us in Christ. And like circumcision, which serves as a memorial of reminding every household that the Lord keeps his covenant.

And that they are his people and he is their God. Baptism is also deeply, deeply personal. And it is connected to our future. So that we see something similar.
We see something similar in the sacrament of baptism. As we do in circumcision. You see, in baptism we are reminded that the mighty new covenant of the Lord has been inaugurated by the Son.
Our souls have been redeemed through death to life. We are washed in the very precious blood of Christ Jesus, the Messiah. Who willingly gave up his life for us on the cross of Calvary.
So, when we are tempted. When we are ready to trust in other gods. When we are ready to embrace all the benefits of the kingdom. And reject the king.
[23:53] To embrace all of the benefits of the covenant. And yet reject the covenant maker. We remember our baptism. We remember that we are marked out as God's people.

We remember that God gave us a memorial. And this leads to a second memorial that God will give us in our text.
That gives it the nation of Israel, but also us in our text. And this leads to the second point. Where we are going to look at not just the ritual act, but the ritual meal. Look with me at verses 10 to 12.
While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal. They kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover on that very day they ate of the produce of the land.
Unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. No longer manna for the people of Israel.
[24:59] But they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. A new era has begun for Israel.

They have crossed over the Jordan. If you were here last week, you remember I mentioned how they are talked about as a people. And when they cross the Jordan, they are referred to as a nation.
The old disobedient generation has died. This new generation, they are walking in obedience and submission to the Lord.
And now they get to celebrate the Passover once again. And this is the first time that Passover is celebrated in the Lamb. The second time it is celebrated after the Exodus.
Only we see here that this time they no longer bear, verse 9, the reproach of Egypt. They are fully free.
[25:58] They have renewed their covenant with the Lord. They are ready to follow him by faith. So this Passover is different for a number of reasons.

One of the reasons is that, yes, it does look back to what God has done. In the past. But more importantly, or maybe equally important, it looks towards the future.
It looks back towards the past. And it looks towards the future. Towards what the Lord will do. So the question is, what will the Lord do?
And that is this. He will provide everything they need to flourish in the land. What do I mean? Okay, so since leaving Egypt, this is a bit of a Coles notes on the history of Israel.

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They leave Egypt and they are wandering the desert. The thing about deserts are that they are not exactly the most fertile places. I am not sure if you knew that. They produce nothing.
[26:59] So what does God do in his goodness and kindness? He provides manna. Manna is this heavenly bread. I am not going to get into what exactly that means. But God, supernaturally again, provides food and sustenance for an entire nation.

An entire people group. For 40 years. Every single day they would get up. They would gather the manna. They would eat it. Every day they would go to bed and they would rise up and there would be more food for them.
This is God and his goodness and kindness expressed to them. So, it is not a throwaway line when we read in verse 11 and 12 that they began to eat the fruit of the land.
And that actually the manna is no more. The manna is no more. So, three times in two verses. In verses 11 and 12. It says, they ate of the produce of the land.
They ate of the produce of the land. And then at the end, they ate of the produce of the land of Canaan. And it says right in there that there is no longer manna for the people of Israel.
[28:03] No longer do they eat the food of wandering. They now have the land that will produce what they need. They are to work the land.

They are to settle the land. They are to participate in the flourishing of the land. They now receive the land by faith as free men. And the manna has stopped.
Does that mean though that the Lord's provision has stopped? Right? They wake up. There is bread. Now they wake up. And they throw on the overalls. And they get the shovels.
And they get the plows. And they work and break their back. Making the desert bloom. Is this a lack of God's provision?
You know, we tend to miss or misunderstand God's provision often. It's easy to do so. The world we live in is full of cause and effect. Okay? You go to work.
[29:00] You work. You come home. Every couple weeks. You pay. Every month. Whatever your pay cycle is. You get a pay. You take the money.

You pay your mortgage. You pay your bills. You get groceries delivered. I know most of you probably get groceries delivered. Nobody's going to get groceries these days. You're getting groceries delivered.
Okay? You're taking your family out for dinner sometime. You're putting your kids in sports. All of it, it costs money. You work.
You get paid. You spend the money. You go to bed. You wake up. You do the same thing over and over and over again. It's cause and effect. And although this might seem like cause and effect, God is not uninvolved in your day to day.
He is still very involved in your day to day. It is just as much proof of God's provision that you even wake up and that you are given the strength and the know-how to carry out your job.
[30:02] You worked hard to get your job. You networked. You spiced up your LinkedIn resume, hopefully, without lying. You got a job.

In the end, it's the Lord who provides. It is God who is giving you strength and breath and life. And this is because God isn't just the creator of the world.
Okay? The creator of the cosmos. He is also the sustainer of all things. Everything that exists also perpetuates because of his power and might. You can't divorce God being the creator from God being the sustainer of all things.
So he has sustained us and he continues to provide for us. Therefore, we must recognize that whether it is manna from heaven or grain, we have parched ourselves. All of it is equally from the hand of God.
We have to. We have to learn how to see the supernatural provision of God, but also the natural provision from God.
[31:08] So I consult three or four different commentaries as I prepare for Sundays. And one of the commentators I look at, his name is Dale Ralph Davis.

He's an Old Testament scholar in the States. And he, about this, I love this line, okay? One day I will write and come up with such things.
But this is what he says. Most of God's gifts to his people are not dazzling and gaudy, but wrapped in simple brown paper. And I love that.

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I love that because it draws our attention to the fact that God delights in sustaining our lives, even when we don't see it and recognize it and therefore can't give him praise.
That he still delights in sustaining and uplifting his creation. And sustaining and uplifting his people.
So a question for us. Can we grow as people to recognize the simple brown paper of the Lord in our lives?
[32:14] Or, or are we going to give in to the temptation to curse God because we do not see the bright, gaudy wrapping paper?

God is at work, friends. He is at work in your lives. He is providing for you by giving you grain to parch.
And it is to your benefit that you are not getting manna from heaven. If God gave you everything, everything you ever wanted, it is no guarantee that you would walk in holiness and goodness and love.
I think it would create in us monsters. So going back to the Passover. I mentioned that the Passover does not just look back to what God has done, but also at what he will do in future.
We see that like the ritual act of circumcision, this ritual meal also serves as a memorial. It reminds the people that the Lord is mighty. And he is mighty to save and that he saves to the uttermost.
[33:26] That he takes away the reproach of sin and death and brings us into life and fullness of joy. So it is with Holy Communion, which also was a Passover meal.

I mean, if circumcision is likened to baptism, then Passover is likened to Holy Communion. And it reminds us weekly that we have been saved to the uttermost.
That God has brought us from death into life, into brokenness, into the fullness of joy. And it helps us to look forward ultimately to the ultimate promised land.
When the new heavens and the new earth will become reality. Where the church, the bride of Christ, will sit down with Christ the bridegroom and partake of the marriage supper of the land. It always looks ahead.
When you gather at the table with me and with each other this morning, you know what? It prefigures, it imagines, it helps us to anticipate the marriage supper of the land.
[34:35] The culmination of all of time. The very, very high point that will not be a high point and then go back down, but will remain high for all of eternity.

It reminds us that the Lord has provided for everything we need, including, including himself. And especially himself.
For he has provided his very son. Going back to my friend. My friend chose to follow the Lord ultimately. Just in case you were wondering.
It went against conventional wisdom. My friend had to quit his job. My friend did not pursue the romantic interest.
He did not compromise his faith. And he has told me on numerous occasions that whatever he lost and he did lose in deciding to follow Christ, it was 100% worth it.
[35:39] The Lord satisfied the restlessness of his heart. The opening question. Is Christianity worth the cost?

It's an important question to ask. And keep asking it if you're still unsatisfied. Keep asking it. But I'll just say this as we close. If we are afraid that a life in Christ will cost us too much.
And it will cost us. Make no mistake. Just know that God in Christ Jesus, fully man and fully God, has removed our reproach.
And the cost to him was his own life. And if friends, he gave you his own life.
And you find yourself in a situation where you are wondering, man, following Christ means going against conventional wisdom. And saying no to some good things.
[36:41] But maybe in a way that is devoid of faith. Is devoid of trust in him. Just know that if God gave you his own son, will he not give you everything you need in this life?

I'll close with Romans 8 verses 31 and 32. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
Thanks. Thank you.

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