

# Reproach Removed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn again with me to Joshua chapter 5. Reading 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. While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the 14th day of the month, in the evening, on the plains of Jericho.

Well, as you know, in the history of God's people in the Old Testament, there were high days and there were low days. High days, days of great dramatic events.

The whole of the book of Exodus, really, is a narrative about the great redemptive acts of God. Great, great things happening. Or days when God is blessing his people in a special and a clear way.

Perhaps revival days. Towards the end of the Old Testament, you come to the experiences in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, where there were days of revival.

[ 1 : 22 ] In the days that we have in Joshua chapter 1 to chapter 5, we have high days. We have days of God's promises being repeated and fulfilled.

We have days also of the people's obedience. The spies had already been sent up by Joshua into the promised land. They had come back and the people had been willing this time to go up and to take the land.

There were days of miracle and days of faith. When the people of God were commanded to walk towards the Jordan and the priests were told to carry the ark into the Jordan, carrying the ark on their shoulders, were told the Jordan was in flood.

And so there had to be faith. There had to be confidence in the word of God. And they moved forward. And as they moved forward and their feet go into this raging water, perhaps the water piles up.

The miracle takes place. And then there's a lull, you might say, of about three days. Days in which, in chapter 5, Joshua commanded to have the people circumcised.

[ 2 : 42 ] And from our viewpoint today, we might think, well, that's just one of those ritualistic obligations that were incumbent upon the people of God. And we might say, well, the exciting things are still to happen in chapter 6 when Jericho is going to be taken.

I want to invite you today to see that differently. I want you to see Joshua chapter 5 has been a really high day in the experience of the people of God.

A day when God draws close in a very clear and indeed a visible way. And when he blesses them spiritually and therefore, I think, also emotionally, where their emotions are impacted.

Joshua 5 would have been a period of celebration for the people of God. Now, our text is 5 and 9, and the words we have here today, I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.

Reproach, of course, means shame. It means rebuke. And that tells us something about the condition that the people of God had been living under.

[ 3 : 50 ] They had been living with a sense of shame. And we should be able to relate to that very, very easily. All of us, I think, know what it is to be ashamed. All of us know what it is to have felt some sense of disgrace or some sense of humiliation.

To have spoken out of turn, perhaps. To have done something of which we're completely ashamed of. We're believers. We all know that experience. We might even now be living with a sense of shame and not wanting people to know just what is going on in our lives, perhaps in our domestic situations.

We would rather people not know because we have a sense of shame. Israel's lived with this sense of shame, this burden, for many, many years. Sometimes, I believe, they would have been conscious of it, very aware of it, sometimes not so aware.

We're told that it's the reproach of Egypt. And there are many views about what that means, but I would go with a fairly traditional view. And it's the reproach, I would say, that they rightly feel before God.

They feel this shame, they feel this reproach, because God himself has made them feel it. You remember when they left Egypt, God had blessed them, as I said earlier.

[ 5 : 05 ] They had been rescued from the clutches of Pharaoh. They had crossed the Red Sea by faith. And Pharaoh and his armies, when they had tried to cross the Red Sea, the waters poured in on top of them.

They came to Sinai. And God at Sinai constituted them into a nation. He gave them rules. He gave them moral laws.

He gave them religious and ceremonial laws. He gave them national laws that would pass away when the nation of Israel passed away. They entered into covenant with God there.

They took upon themselves the obligations of the covenant, all that God has said, we will do. God took them away from Sinai. He took them to the borders of the promised land. You know how the spies went up into the promised land the first time.

And they came back and they said, the land indeed is flowing with milk and honey. It's a great land. Here is the produce of the land. But there are giants in the land. There are forces in the land that we can't contend with.

[ 6 : 09 ] And they quivered with fear. And they quivered with faithlessness. And what happens? God rebukes them. God shames them.

He swears that all those males who had left Egypt, all those 20 years or more, they would not enter into the promised land. And they've been living with that shame now for nigh on 40 years.

And every time somebody died, they would have been reminded of it. And remember, 600,000 people died.

600,000 men above 20 years died in the space of that time. They would have had many opportunities to remember that they were living under God's displeasure.

And I would say also that every time a male child was born, their consciences would also have been pierced or should have been pierced. because they weren't circumcising their children.

[ 7 : 15 ] God seems to have banned the practice, the right of circumcision. So the parents were not allowed to circumcise their children in these years.

Why? Because they were covenant breakers. God denied them the privilege of having the promises imprinted in the flesh. You see, circumcision was a sign in the flesh reminding them I am your God.

You are my people. Reminding them of the land promises. I have promised you this land flowing with milk and honey. But they had proved faithless. They denied the covenant.

That was to their shame. And circumcision denied them. Why is it the reproach of Egypt? Well, quite simply because the source of their infidelity, the source of their unfaithfulness came from their sojourn in Egypt.

It came from the land of darkness. It's there the descendants of Jacob had lived, had learned how to love and serve false gods.

[ 8 : 24 ] Learn to serve idols. And the weakness of the professed faith in God when they came out of Egypt, when it was tested, it failed.

It failed on the borders of Canaan. There's another reason people give and I think it's valid.

Another reason why they felt shame. They've been walking in the wilderness for between 38 years and 40 years. Can you imagine how they left Egypt full of confidence, perhaps some of them with a swagger?

Some of them thinking God is on our side and God's going to take us to the promised land and everything's going to be fine. And maybe they despised the Egyptians that they were leaving behind. Can you imagine as they tramped round the wilderness just how they felt when another group of people, another group of nomads, came upon them and asked who they were and asked, what's your story?

And they said, well, we are actually the people of Yahweh. And he took us out of Egypt but he hasn't taken us yet into the promised land. Can you imagine the shame?

[ 9 : 43 ] Can you imagine how that confidence confidence and that empty swagger that they had when they left Egypt, how that was just taken away bit by bit by bit.

But today in Joshua chapter 5 God does something marvelous, does he not? God rolls away the reproach. What's he doing?

He's restoring his people to favor. It's like the days of Isaiah 40 when the prophet is commanded to speak, comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry out to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned for she is received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

This is a great day. Spiritually, God is drawing near to them once again and when he draws close he's able to enter right into the heart and he's able to affect our emotions and he's able to bring us joy.

[10:46] Before continuing, I want to say if there are any backsliders in our congregation today, people who feel that they're living under his displeasure, who wonder if there's ever going to be a way out from your wilderness experience, well remember the story of the people of God in the Old Testament, 40 years in the wilderness wilderness, and he brings them back and I say don't give up, he will lead you back to himself, he will lead his people back to himself.

Now remember to fulfill your own responsibilities, do not harden your hearts, the psalm cries out to us, don't harden your hearts as in the day of temptation, don't deliberately say no to when God himself thrives with you and seeks to mold you and bring you back into his presence, don't be cynical, don't harden up, you fulfill your own responsibilities, you seek him with all your heart, you put away your sin and you go back to the cross and you seek his forgiveness there.

I want to use the remainder of the time to try to make Joshua chapter 5 relevant to ourselves under three headings, what God does, what God wants from us and what God delights in, what God does and we're told I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.

God rolls away the reproach. Egypt as you all know I'm sure is a picture of spiritual bondage. church. It's a picture of the way God's people were before they became Christians. It's a picture of what it's like to be dead in trespasses and sins.

[12:49] It's a picture of what it means to be at enmity with God, the enemy of God. And when we were dead in trespasses and sins, when we were the enemies of God, we were children of wrath, we were offensive to God, we were an offense in the nostrils of God.

Our unbelief was. But we're told in the New Testament, are we not? For instance, in Paul's letter to Ephesians, but God who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ.

This is what he does. Even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, he makes us alive together with Christ. He brings us to life. He regenerates us.

He pours his spirit into our lives. Again, in Colossians, Paul speaks, and he says, in him you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.

Paul is speaking there again about the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Not circumcised in the flesh, but in the heart. And along with that, the forgiveness of all your trespasses.

[14:11] He has nailed the charges that were against us to the cross. And the result, surely for us and for every believer, is this. When you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, the reproach of your sinful nature, the offence of it, the shame of it before God, that was taken away.

And we are not to feel ashamed before God. We are not to have an empty arrogance, we are not to have a swagger before God. But we are commanded to have a holy boldness.

We are commanded to have a holy confidence when we enter into his presence to pray and to worship. God, isn't it great to know that the reproach, the shame, has been taken away?

That there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus? Many of us too often allow the evil one to bring back the sense of shame, to bring back the sense of reproach, to condemn us.

And we have to recall the words of Romans 8 to our minds. So often there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For some, perhaps those of you who are converted, perhaps later in life, you know what it's like to have been in Egypt.

[15:31] You can remember these days of darkness and you know what it is to be a complete stranger, you might say, to the covenant. You'd cast off the traces of your upbringing.

And when you were converted, there was great joy, there was laughter, and there was singing. Why? Because you were now entering a new guilt-free world.

There was that laughter that comes from knowing God was your friend, not your enemy. What has God done? He has taken away the shame.

He's nailed the charges to the cross, and he's dealt with our sin. God wants us to live by faith.

Circumcision, this in Joshua chapter 5, circumcision took place, remember, in full view of the city of Jericho. A walled city.

[16:40] A city with its own army. And one thing that circumcision does to an army is it incapacitates it. This minor surgical operation in the flesh.

It's painful, and it would render an army unable to fight and to defend itself. And yet the people of God, in full view of the city of Jericho, were commanded to be circumcised.

Indeed, as Psalm 23 reminds us, a table you have prepared for me in the presence of my enemies. It's one of these kind of days, where there has to be faith.

Yes, there are enemies all around. And certainly we're told in Joshua 5, chapter 2, that when the people of Canaan had heard about the crossing of the Red Sea, and heard about the crossing of the Jordan, their hearts had melted, there was no longer any spirit in them, because of the people of Israel.

But in many ways, the individuals within the camp of Israel wouldn't have known that. They had to take that as part of the information coming to them. They had to believe that God would protect them.

[17:50] And you and I have to live by faith. We've got to live believing what God has told us. And I believe more and more we've got to do that.

What do I mean? Well, we begin the Christian life through faith, do we not? We put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. But one of the great temptations is to then claw back, if you like, control for ourselves, and start relying upon ourselves.

Isn't that one of the regular features of the New Testament? One of the regular heresies that Paul has to combat again and again and again. Where the Judaizers come into the church and they say, well look, Christ is okay, Christ is fine, yes you need Christ, but you need more than Christ, you need to rely on the works of the law.

And the Judaizers are really saying, you need to rely on your own endeavors once again. Paul sums it up in Galatians 3, oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified.

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? having begun in the Spirit, are you now going to be made perfect?

[19:11] Are you going to mature by the flesh? Are you going to rely on obedience, on the works of the law? No, we have to continue in faith, trusting in Jesus Christ, not just at the beginning, but throughout our lives.

And wherever there's a conflict between what the world wants, and what Christ wants, and what conscience tells you is the right thing to do.

We have to trust in God, we have to trust in Christ, and we have to believe that he will provide for us, and we have to believe that he will protect us on that day of battle and conflict.

So living by faith, he wants from us. But also he wants us to live in a different way from before.

Circumcision was reminding them of the fact that they were God's people, and now, having crossed the Jordan in God's land, they couldn't live the way that they did in the wilderness.

They couldn't continue to murmur, and grumble, and complain. They couldn't keep hankering back after Egypt.

[20:38] They must live in God's land. I recall reading the story of Jacob, and I think it's in Genesis 32, where Jacob is returning back to the promised land, and he sends gifts ahead with members of his family and his servants, because he's coming back to meet with Esau.

But he's coming back to meet with Esau using still his own guile and his own craft. He's entering into the promised land, relying upon his own strength, relying upon the flesh.

And you know what happens? A man wrestles with Jacob. Jacob. And during the night, there is this great wrestling going on, as God wrestles with Jacob.

And Jacob is strong-willed and he's stubborn. And not until the Lord knocks out his hip, not until then, does he realize that he can no longer rely upon his own strength.

Not until then does he cry out for the blessing. And as he enters then into the promised land, he enters a different character, with a different way of thinking.

[ 21 : 51 ] He enters limping, as many of us do today. Limping. It's not a great crime to limp, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically.

We do limp, and we limp because we know our failures. We know where we've been. And we know that we can't be arrogant or proud. God's people can no longer live the way they've lived.

They've been circumcised. It's a symbol of their consecration to God. And we are similarly today to re-consecrate ourselves to God.

We are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to him, totally committed to him. You see, the thing about the language of sacrifice is that the sacrifice was total.

There's nothing held back. Paul didn't just command us to think in that term, present yourselves as living sacrifices because that is your reasonable or logical service.

[ 22 : 54 ] He wasn't just using the language for you. He describes himself in these terms. Paul, a bond servant, a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. In terms of practical application, just today, because this is a preparatory service, there might be some here who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

Spiritually, you're alive before God, but you know, you've never made that public. You've never gone to the table. Can I remind you that the spiritual act, if you like, the trust of faith, the trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, that personal trust, that is the major step.

Someone said to me recently when I was trying to encourage them to think seriously about going to the table, well, it's a big step. It's a big step. Big commitment.

The big commitment is committing to Christ. That's the huge commitment. That's the radical change. Going to the table should just be a natural progression, a follow-on, an extra step.

But when you put it into the terms of consecration, and presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice, it doesn't rank at all.

[ 24 : 32 ] Because the table is a privilege. The table is a means of nourishment. The table is a means of helping us. Helping us what? Helping us consecrate ourselves.

Helping us devote ourselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot do that in our own strength. We need fed. We need nourished. We need strengthened. Totally.

Owned by God is the language of sacrifice. Giving ourselves up. Now, I've come to the conclusion that there are some people who hear these words and yet they still manage to keep that commitment at arm's length.

and I'm speaking and I'm speaking about people who would call themselves believers and I believe are believers. They hear about this call to present themselves as limited sacrifices and they say, well, it's for some people.

It's for the holier ones. It's for those who are really committed. It. But it's not. It's for all of us. From the youngest to the oldest.

[ 25 : 47 ] Remember also that in Israel, just two chapters later, when one man sinned, the whole nation suffered.

when Achan took some of the devoted things from Jericho and hid them in his tent and the people went up to fight against Ai, the people of Ai came back and killed several of their comrades.

The nation suffered because of one man's sin and surely, surely there's an appeal there to each and every one of us. Don't you be the weak link in God's army.

what God wants. He wants us to live by faith. He wants us to consecrate ourselves to him because circumcision is about consecration. But finally and briefly, what God delights in.

And I want to take you now to verse 10. While the people of Israel were a camp at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the 14th day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. They kept the Passover.

[ 26 : 54 ] What does God delight in? God delights in the fellowship of his people. In the fellowship of his people. You see, after this re-consecration, after they were all circumcised, they're not just ready for service.

They're ready for fellowship. They're ready for him. for him to come amongst them and to bless them.

There had been no circumcision for nearly 40 years. There had been no Passover for nearly 40 years.

Not since Sinai. Another privilege withdrawn from them. but today, that Gilgong, God has made them ready.

He's made them ready for himself. And if we move 3,000 years on up to our own generation, and the Passover's been replaced by the Lord's Supper, we celebrate or we remember rather, the Lord in his death.

[ 28 : 20 ] And all those that are circumcised in heart are invited to sit round that Lord's table. And there's a picture there of God fellowshiping with his people at the table of the Lord.

It's a marvellous picture. And it points forward to the future, doesn't it? It points forward to that great marriage feast. It points forward to the new heavens and the new earth.

It points forward to what we read about in Revelation 21, where we're told, Behold, the dwelling of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear and so on. What has it all been about? What is this whole book about? Bringing glory to God, yes.

What does God say he delights in? Why has God redeemed a people? Why did God send his son? Because he delights in the fellowship of a people.

[ 29 : 32 ] And as we heard last night from Mr. Morrison, we heard about God's electing and predestinating love and God, what God did to make his people saints and bring them to himself.

Why? Because he loved to be in fellowship with his people. That's what he delights in. That's what the people of God in Joshua chapter 5 were being prepared for.

Not just another ritualistic obligation, not just another meal, not just another sacrifice, no, they were being prepared for him to come with them, come in with them and to bless them, to enlarge their hearts and to bring them periods of rejoicing, strengthening their faith.

What a vision it is, I think, to go forward to the Lord's table thinking this is his table. He's the host, he's the master at the table, he's welcoming me and he's cleansed my sins away, he's made me ready for fellowship.

And whether our weakness is here and whether our still sins here, and we live still with sinful natures and the spirit still has to war against the flesh and the flesh wars against the spirit, we're taught to look forward to the day when there's no more curse, when there's no more sin, when there's no more tears, when there's no more death, nothing to take away from the celebration of joy that there is between God and his people.

[ 31 : 08 ] As we go forward tomorrow, maybe go forward with these thoughts in our mind. Let's pray. We stand for it.