

***Joshua: God Keeps His Promises***  
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series  
Fall 2022  
Pastor David Palmer  
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**TEXT: Joshua 5:1-15**



Good morning, Beloved. We confirm our identity in many ways. We mark our identity with official documents. We reveal our identity in what we wear, what we eat, and what we celebrate. We show our identity most clearly in who we worship. This Sunday we continue our fall series entitled *Joshua: God Keeps His Promises*. Our passage this week in Joshua 5 sets before us three related scenes that shape who we are. We mark our bodies with a covenant sign to honor him with how we live. We celebrate the covenant meal to remember all that God has done for all of us. We take off our shoes in God's presence to affirm that we stand before him in humility on holy ground. Our identity is most secure when it is grounded in the Lord. So keep your scriptures open.

We are going to look first at the primary identity God gives to us, and that identity is rooted in covenant. Covenant is an important word in the Bible. If you've never opened the Bible, and you open it for the first time, the biggest division in the Bible is between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word testament is the Latin translation for covenant. We talk about covenant, old covenant and new covenant, and this is a relationship that's binding between God and His people. Covenant isn't something abstract. It's not theoretical. It is personal. It is practical. It shapes your identity. When you get married, you enter into a covenant. It is something you take on an oath, a promise. It is something that changes your identity. Something that comes with that commitment is a reciprocal bond of obligation and responsibility. Our covenant identity this morning, first of all, is signed upon our bodies. The Bible says that God makes us in His image and that our physical person is the apparatus we use to live out our lives. We're not just spiritual creatures. We are physical creatures with real bodies, and God invites us to mark our bodies with a covenant sign.

Let's look at this first section in Joshua 5:1.

*"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."*

This is what we talked about last Sunday in Joshua 3 and 4 when God miraculously replayed the Exodus miracle. God brought us out of Egypt by dividing the waters, and now He is bringing us into the land by rolling back the Jordan River. We talked about how that rollback was 15 miles of water rolled back, and we walked across on dry land.

When you see the Jordan River from the satellite image, you can see the Jordan marking the land and dividing East and West. We cross this boundary not on our own strength. We cross it in the spring when the waters overflow, and after crossing over, the Lord tells Joshua to circumcise the nation. Circumcision is a bodily sign of the covenant. It's what God told Abraham to do in Genesis 17. Abraham was circumcised when he was 99 years old. Most of his life was lived uncircumcised. Late in his life, God told him In Genesis 17:9:



*"As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations."*

Every male is circumcised, and God says: "This is a **physical sign of the covenant** between us." It's a sign that communicates a dedication to God. It's a sign that signals that God is the One who brings descendants. It's also an imprecatory sign: "May God call down judgment upon me." It's kind of a death sign and then life that's in God. Circumcision is practiced by male descendants, and this practice God's people do uniquely in the ancient world for thousands of years. It's unique, and it makes you look different from the people around you. It's a mark on your physical person.

The prophets describe circumcision, though, not merely as a physical sign, but they also use this image metaphorically in powerful ways. Moses says in Deuteronomy 10:16:

*"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn."*

Some of you—and we have a lot of doctors and nurses in here—are asking if this is possible. To circumcise the heart shows us the meaning of circumcision, that's a part that represents the whole, the whole person dedicated to God. Circumcise your heart and be no longer stubborn.

Jeremiah 4 says: "Circumcise yourselves. Remove the foreskin of your heart and be fully dedicated to God." So Joshua does what God commands. He circumcises the whole nation at a place called Gibeath-haaraloth. In the Old Testament, place names often signal the key events that happened there. For example, Mount Sinai is called Mount Sinai because Sinai means bush, the burning bush, and the whole mountain is like the "Mountain of the Burning Bush. Most of us remember Sinai. That's a critical location. Most of us, if we've been following Jesus for a while, remember the place of Golgotha or Calvary. It is the "Place of the Skull," and that's the place where Jesus was crucified. Most of us don't remember Gibeath-haaraloth because in Hebrew that means the "Hill of the Foreskins."

What happened there was a renewal of the covenant. What happened there was the whole nation re-commits to God. Some have wondered why they weren't circumcised throughout the wilderness journey. The text says it was because they were waiting until they crossed the Jordan. They were waiting until a generation that did not trust God, the men of war, died in the wilderness, and now the moment is for their children. They are being raised up and they are renewing the covenant. This is important because you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven based on the faith of your parents. You have to come to a place where you say: "I believe this." You have to come to a place to say: "I know the Lord can be trusted, and I'm ready to enter into that covenant on my own volition." You can't become a Christian just by being in church. You can't be just dropped off in here and magically become a believer. Every generation has to confess their own faith and identity, and that's what's happening here.

Then the Lord interprets this to Joshua and says in Joshua 5:9:

*"Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day."*

This is the name we probably should hold onto. Gilgal means to roll away. It's actually why the area of Galilee is called Galilee, because of its rounded shape. Gilgal means, "I've rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you this day and confirmed upon you My covenant identity." The reproach of Egypt is what happens to human beings when they are oppressed and enslaved for generations. You feel shame; your head is down. The reproach of Egypt is to lose track of your identity, to know that God has spoken promises to generations of old that haven't come true. You're losing track of who you are, and you start to wonder: "Who am I? Is God going to keep His word? What's my identity?" You can start to think: "Should I just make up my own identity?" You start to allow yourself to be moved with currents around you, and you're losing track of it and the ground is shifting underneath you. Then you enter into covenant with God and He says: "I'm rolling away the reproach. No shame, no guilt, no dishonor." Hallelujah! Did you know that *"if anyone is in Christ, there is now no condemnation"*? It doesn't matter what

happened to you. It doesn't matter what you did. When we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, our shame, our guilt is rolled away. Leviticus 24:13 says:

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high."*

I am a big fan of eye contact. Eye contact is a signal, a nonverbal signal. At a baseline it's like saying: "I'm listening to you," and that feels good, right? If you're talking to someone and they're looking away, you start to feel ill at ease. This is a very bad dynamic in a marriage. People notice if you're looking at them. When you're talking with someone and you notice their eyes are looking down, perhaps that person may feel on the margins or is wondering: "Do I really have a place here?" Maybe something difficult or hard has happened in their lives, and they're wondering: "Can God forgive me, or did God see me?" Part of the beauty of the God of the Bible is that He rescues us, forgives us, and then lifts us up so we can make eye contact with Him and with one another.

Circumcision is the covenant sign in the Old Testament. As believers in Christ, we have a covenant sign, too, that's analogous to this. It's the covenant sign of baptism. In Colossians, Paul says this to a growing group of Christians. He says in Colossians 2:11-12:

*"In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead."*

Just as circumcision is an imprecatory sign, baptism is an imprecatory sign. You go under the waters, and that is a uniting yourself with Christ in His death, and then He raises you up. In water baptism, the hardest part is actually getting the person all the way under the water because God made water so buoyant. The hardest part for us in coming to Christ, Beloved, is to say: "I need the death of Christ. I need forgiveness, and I trust Him, and He will bring me to new life." If you have never been baptized, I want to urge you to consider that. If you've never said publicly: "Jesus, I identify with Your death for my forgiveness, and will You raise me to life?" I welcome you to reach out to me or Pastor Scott. We would love to talk with you about that.

The second scene in our passage is that our covenant identity is not only marked in our physical person, but ***our covenant identity is celebrated within our body through food***. When I was a university student, I had a very dear friend. We were on the track team together. He was a very athletic guy, a very healthy eater, and we had long conversations. He pontificated that it would be so nice if God had just created the world so that we could have a nutritional ball and just eat it quickly, and we'd have all the nutrition that we needed, and we could just keep going. When

he first said that, I thought it sounded rather good. But the more I thought about it, I thought: "If that's how we ate, we would actually miss out on a lot. We would miss out on 99% of the dinner conversation because dinner would be over in a flash. We wouldn't be able to differentiate different kinds of food, and different kinds of food mark different occasions. There are special times of eating in the Scripture, and what you eat on a special moment helps to reinforce your identity.

While we were encamped at Gilgal, the first thing we did was to eat the Passover. The Passover is celebrated on the 14th day of the month, and the Passover is a special meal with special foods. It comes with a story. In retelling it, we remind ourselves of our identity around the meal. We eat on the 14th day of the month, and this day will become profoundly important for Christians, because the 14th of the month will end up being Good Friday when we mark the moment of our forgiveness and our salvation! God's people eat the Passover, and the very day after the Passover, all of a sudden we eat the fruit of the land which God promised back in



Deuteronomy. God promised in Deuteronomy 8:7-8:

*"For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey."*

These seven species of the land are celebrated throughout the Scripture: two grains, five fruits. These are the fruits of the land that are acceptable offerings in the sanctuary. God provides, and we eat the fruit of the land the day after being circumcised in our bodily identity, affirming our covenant place, celebrating our covenant identity through the celebration of the Passover. Then, the day after, the manna stops. We have been eating manna for 40 years: every day, God's provision. It's why Jesus teaches us to pray: *"Give us this day our daily bread."* God provides every day. The provision of manna in the wilderness was to humble us and alert us of our absolute dependence on God. In Deuteronomy 8:3, we read:

*"And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."*

Manna, or *man-hu* in Hebrew means: "What is it?" I don't know what this is. My dad doesn't know what this is, but the Lord says: "I fed you this way so that you would know in the wilderness that *"man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."* There is something critical, Beloved, to know about feasting on manna

every day: I'm depending on God. But now that we have crossed into the land, there is something new to discover about God, and that's His lavish provision in our lives. We celebrate this covenant identity not only in our body but around the table with what we eat and how we eat it.

The third scene in our chapter is very dramatic. Joshua is by Jericho, that walled city that will be prominent for us next Sunday, and he looks up. Notice he wasn't looking down. He looks up and he sees before him someone is standing with a drawn sword. Joshua is overwhelmed by the Person he sees. He is so overwhelmed that he approaches the Person and says, in Joshua 5:13, with hope: *"Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"* in other words he says: *"Are you there be fighting for us, or are we going to have to face you?"* The Person responds emphatically in Joshua 5:14a:

*"No; but I am the Commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come."*

In other words, "Neither." This is important for us, because the Lord is not in our cause, or in our adversary's cause, but the Lord commands His cause, and ***we find our identity with God's empowering presence and serving Him.*** "Neither," He says. *"I am the Commander of the army of the Lord, the host of the Lord,"* and he says: *"Now I have come."* This term, the Lord of hosts, or the Lord of armies, occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament. The God of the Bible is a mighty warrior, powerful to save, and He commands the host of heaven. He loves to describe Himself in this way, and I find this to be a neglected feature of God's identity. We don't talk about this as often as the Scriptures do, and we need to recover that not only do we mark our body with the sign of covenant identity, not only do we feast around the table and mark and celebrate our covenant identity, but our covenant identity is rooted in hope and confidence and joy in the fact that the God who commands the heavenly armies has called us to serve Him.

Isaiah saw the Lord. We sang together with the Seraphim in Isaiah 6:3 saying:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"*

Isaiah 45:6 says:

*"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god.'"*

Zechariah 4:6 says:

*"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."*

The Lord of the heavenly armies is the God who calls us into His service. That changes everything. That means that in the difficult situation you face the God of heavenly armies is out

in front of you. Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," has this cryptic lyric in it that sometimes when we sing, the lyrics fly right past us. The hymn starts:

"A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark never failing;  
our helper he, amid the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
does seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great,  
and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal."

The devil is armed with hatred, and he seeks to wreak havoc. The second verse says this:

"Did we in our own strength confide,  
our striving would be losing,  
were not the right Man on our side,  
the Man of God's own choosing.  
You ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is he;  
**Lord Sabaoth** his name,  
from age to age the same;  
and he must win the battle."

That is Lord of hosts. Jesus is the Commander of the heavenly armies, Beloved. Joshua sees the Lord Jesus before we are able to. He sees the Commander of the heavenly armies, and this is not an angel, because Joshua falls on his face and worships, and worship is rightly given to God alone. Then we read in Joshua 5:14b:

*"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, 'What does my Lord say to his servant?'"*

The Lord Jesus, the Commander of the Lord's army says in Joshua 5:15:

*"Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.'  
And Joshua did so."*

Joshua must have heard from Moses about the moment when God met Moses at the burning bush and proclaimed His name and told Moses: "Take off your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Beloved, our identity is most secure when we stand in humility and holiness before God.

Wherever you may be tempted to reach this morning, say: "This is how I know who I am." The most secure place to stand is in humility and holiness before God. You joined me and others in writing hundreds of Scriptures on the platform while this was being built this spring. The Scripture that is written right under where I am standing is Isaiah 6:3: *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."* When we seek to know who we are, we know who we are in humility and in holiness before God. When God's priests led us across the river last week, they stepped barefoot. Some of you may have noticed that I'm preaching without shoes this morning for the first time in 20 years. I weighed up whether or not to do that. I wanted to do that so you would remember. When we wear our shoes, we signal ownership. When you walk into someone's house with your shoes on you, you can offend your host. You can track dirt into the house, and some people get distressed by that. But, in the Scripture's world, shoes are sign of ownership, and that's why the priests minister barefoot in the sanctuary. That's why the Levites have no earthly portion, and that's why I wanted you to have a visual reminder that our calling as believers in Christ is to share in an identity that's grounded in God's presence among us, and so Christians should be recognized by their humility and their holiness. These are our identity markers. Our identity markers aren't really best based in our passport national identity, in our state driver's license. It's not based in our favorite sports team. It is rooted in a covenant identity that's marked on our body with baptism. It's marked with the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper as we remember Jesus, our Passover Lamb. And it's marked by God's personal presence among us, and His call to walk humbly before Him in holiness.

This morning I want to invite you to reaffirm your identity as part of God's people. When we reaffirm our identity in Christ, sometimes it requires us to restate that Jesus is the best thing we have. Then sometimes it requires us to say: "Lord, there are some things that have attached to my life. Some of them may be neutral, and some of them may be good but not great, and some of them may be treacherous. But there are things in my life that I need to ask You to get rid of. Lord, would you make me Yours in everything?" I want to pray for us, but then I want to invite you to stand with me and pray together a prayer that Christians, who lived in the south of Spain about a thousand years ago and spoke version of Arabic, composed. It is a prayer from the Mozarabic Breviary, which is a collection of medieval prayers. I want to tell you what the prayer is. It's beautiful, and it's short. The prayer is:

"O Lord Jesus Christ, [What a great start!]  
you are the inexpressible joy of Christians, [You're the best thing we have.]  
take away from us whatever is not yours, [Whatever has come into my life; whatever is  
attached to my soul that's not from You, take it away.]  
and make us yours in all things.  
Hear us, O Lord. Amen.



Isn't that a beautiful short prayer? I am going to pray, and as I do, would you stand with me? Then we are going to recite this prayer together.

Lord Jesus, You call us into covenant this morning. You call us to be Your people. You call us, Lord, to mark our trust in You with a physical sign upon our body to identify with Your death and Your resurrection, and so, Lord, we honor You, and we say "Yes" to You. Lord, we celebrate You, our Passover Lamb, the One who was slain for our forgiveness and the One who provided not only our forgiveness but the One who provides for us, day by day, a daily portion, a Messianic feast. Lord Jesus, we honor You. You are the inexpressible joy of our hearts, and we ask Your forgiveness, Lord, where we have walked not in humility but in pride, where we have arrogantly asserted to You that we want to do things our own way or have hurt the people around us. Forgive us, Lord, we ask, and help us to walk, Lord, in humility before You and in holiness before You. Help us to walk lightly on the earth, knowing that You own it all. And so, Lord, we ask You to take away from us whatever is not Yours, and make us Yours in all things.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Let us now pray this together with one voice:

"Oh Lord Jesus Christ, You are the inexpressible joy of Christians. Take away from us whatever is not Yours and make us Yours in all things. Hear us, oh Lord. Amen."

Praise the Lord.