

God Is With Us

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[0:00] Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast! Now this is why he did so.

All those who came out of Egypt, all the men of military age, died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt. All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.

The Israelites had moved about in the desert 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 fathers 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 camp until they were healed.

[1:35] Then the Lord said to Joshua, Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. 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 of 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 face down to the ground in reverence and asked him, What message does my Lord have for his servant?

[2:48] The commander of the Lord's army replied, Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy. And Joshua did so.

Israel was going to take the land. They were going to have to fight for it. The enemies weren't just going to move out on their own accord.

They were going to have to fight and risk and sweat and bleed in order to take the land. And very much like ourselves.

There's no going to heaven. You're not willing to fight to get there. And so we can relate to our ancient brothers and sisters, these Israelites, as they stood on the other side of the Jordan.

And they have the land, but it's full of enemies. They're going to have to fight for it. And in that case, God, in both our case and in their case, God doesn't want them to think that they have to fight all by themselves.

[4:01] God doesn't want you fighting without you knowing that he is with you. That he is with you. It's not merely you by yourself trying to win heaven.

No, he is with you. And that's what Joshua 5 is all about. Israel has now come through the Jordan River. And God showed them, just like we saw tonight, we sang again, that he showed that he was with them and that he was strong for them.

But God is not done reassuring the Israelites of those truths, of that goodwill, of his love toward them. So Joshua 5, 1 is this transition verse.

And it says that the Amorite kings, the Canaanite kings, they heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan River, and their hearts melted, liquefied. They were shaking in their boots.

They're not going to dare to do anything. And so in chapter 5, what we have then is a breather. There's this deep breath before the plunge, before hostilities break out.

[5:14] And in that time, in this brief pause, God reassures them. He goes out of his way to again and again say, I am with you.

So God assured them of his love. And that tells us something, that tells me something about us. And it tells me that we need that assurance if we're going to fight well.

We need assurance if we are going to battle and win and fight in the Christian life. And you know what I mean by assurance. It's that inward certainty that I am God's child.

I am saved. God is with me. God is for me. It's a certainty of God's love and favor. It's not so much something that we come by by just thinking about it.

It's not just in our heads. It's in our hearts. The Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God. And so the Holy Spirit brings the promises of God and the righteousness and the blood of Jesus Christ and seals those things into our hearts so that we're certain of them, so we know we're his.

[6:39] Our confession has a beautiful chapter on assurance. I would just recommend that you read that. But in our confession, it says that when we have assurance, we experience greater peace and joy, love and thankfulness.

And then it says, and quote, an increased strength and cheerfulness and dutiful obedience. Now, the Roman Catholics said, Luther's greatest sin is this, that he teaches assurance.

He teaches that Christians can know that they are saved, that they are going to heaven, that it is okay with them, between them and God. And what they said was, if people know that they're saved, that they're safe, they're secure, they're in his hands, then they're just going to send it up.

They're just going to do whatever they want if they feel assurance. But that's not what Luther thought, and that's not what the Bible teaches, and that's not what our confession teaches.

That's not it at all. The exact opposite is true. Assurance, when it is of the biblical kind, the kind that we were just talking about, where it's produced by the Holy Spirit, it produces love and joy and peace and thankfulness and an increased strength and willingness for dutiful obedience.

[8:11] And so here the Israelites are, they're on the brink of war. They're going to have some hard obeying in front of them. There's danger.

There's enemies that are in front of them. So where is the strength going to come to keep fighting? Where is the strength going to come to win? It's just this, this assurance, this certainty that God is for us.

God is with us. So brothers and sisters, we do our best fighting, not when we are wondering, is God for me or not? Is he against me?

We do our best fighting when we have the gospel and gospel sweetness in our hearts. When it's rich, we know it's true. When we have God's favor in our sales.

And so here we are in Joshua 5, and in this passage, God assures them in three different ways. And in all three ways, transfer to us. They relate to us.

[9:16] They're not something that's just back here in Joshua. They're all true for us too. And so as we're going through this passage, I want you to take heart because all of these things speak directly to you.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then all of these promises, all of these truths are for you. So how does God show them? How does God show us and assures them of his love?

Well, three different ways, and each one is a different word. Three ways, three words, and the first word is circumcision. That was the first part of chapter 5. And so they cross the river.

They are in hostile territory. And instead of immediately launching into battle, military-wise, it would make sense to do that. The people are afraid.

They're not going to do anything. They're in your hands. It would make sense to attack. But the Lord says, circumcise the Israelites. Now, why is that assuring? Why is that something that they would have taken as, wow, this is good.

[10:18] God is for us. Well, verses 4 through 9 explain it. Remember, this isn't the first time that they have been on the edge of the land or this period.

It's not the first time they've been on the edge of the land before. The first generation had been to the Jordan River as well. They hadn't gone through it. God was ready to give them the land 40 years ago.

And you remember what happened. They rebelled against God. They didn't believe Him. They didn't trust Him. They were afraid. And so God sent them into the desert to wander for 40 years.

And while they wandered, they weren't circumcised. They didn't circumcise the second generation. They didn't circumcise their children. And people have wondered, why?

Why not do that? Why didn't they do that? Something that's just pure disobedience. They should have been. They didn't. They disobeyed. But it never says that.

[11:24] It doesn't say that God ever had a problem with this. It's never called out that way. So I don't think that's it. Some people have thought, well, maybe it was because they were moving around that they didn't do it.

But it's not likely that eight-day-old babies were going to do much walking or slowing them down. And in their wandering, Matthew Henry brings this point up, in their wandering, they stayed at some places for over a year.

It wasn't like every day they were walking. And so I don't think that's it. So why weren't they circumcising their children? And then now, why is that a big deal now that God says, now you do it?

I think we get a clue for it in the middle of verse 6. And you see it there. For the Lord had sworn to them that they would not see the land that He had solemnly promised their fathers to give us a land flowing with milk and honey.

That's a clue. That's a clue for us to understand what is going on here. Who did God originally say, I want you to circumcise your son?

[12:40] Do you remember? It was Abraham. Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. And there God says, the whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God.

And then He says, but as for you, you must keep my covenant. This is my covenant, that you and your descendants, with you and your descendants, every male among you shall be circumcised. It shall be a sign between me and you.

It was a sign. What exactly was it a sign of? It was a sign of this promise that they would receive the land. So circumcision was a covenant sign that said God was their God, and He is going to give them the promised land.

So the covenant sign was attached to the land promise. They went together. And so God said, I'll give you this land. Now you circumcise your sons.

And that's important for us to understand why they weren't circumcising them in the desert while they were wandering, and now why they do it. The whole first generation was under God's judgment.

[13:59] They were not going to receive the land. That promise had been voided in their case. They had broken the promise. They had broken covenant. The land wasn't theirs.

Circumcision was a sign of God's favor, a sign of God's promise, and they had neither. They had neither God's favor nor His promise. And so now here in Joshua 5, it changes.

God says it's time to circumcise everybody. And do you get what He's saying then? The land is yours now. I'm promising it to you again.

The promise is yours again. You're not under a curse anymore. Just as I blessed Abraham, I'm going to bless you. And so yes, it was a painful sign, but in doing it, God was saying, this battle that you're getting ready to enter into, you're not going alone.

You are mine. I am yours. The past is over. The past is forgotten. You aren't living in the wilderness anymore.

[15:10] The time of disfavor is over, and now it's time to enter the land. And so that's why in verse 9, the Lord says, today I have rolled away your reproach, the reproach of Egypt from you.

And we can say, what is that about? What reproach of Egypt is He talking about? Well, Egypt said when Israel left, that the Lord was taking them out into the desert to destroy them.

That was the reproach. Now for 40 years, what did it look like God had been doing to Israel? He had taken them out into the desert, and He had watched them all die.

And Egypt the whole time is saying, see, these people are a cursed people. Even their God isn't for them. Even their God is against them.

No one is for them. Even their God that should be for them is against them. And that was the reproach that was rolled away at Gilgal. And that's what Gilgal means. It means to roll away or to roll.

[16:15] And so it seemed like for 40 years, Egypt was right. God hates His own people. Apparently. That's what the outsiders would have thought. Israel is so weak and so cursed that even their God hates them.

And that is a shame. Did I even have your God for you? But in circumcising everyone, the Lord said, that's all gone.

The cursed days are over. The reproach. The shame. The embarrassment. The embarrassment of Israel must have been saying, we're going to have that land.

And for 40 years, that mocked them. For 40 years, that didn't come true. But now the shame is over. Egypt is never going to be able to say, you're a cursed, hated people.

Your promises aren't going to happen. The things that you're hoping for aren't going to happen. The Lord is saying, I'm rolling away your shame. And so brothers and sisters, that's what God has done for us in the gospel.

[17:20] The shame of being under God's curse. The shame of sin. Paul talks about it, of the things that we are now ashamed of.

Sin is a shameful thing. The shame of our old, worthless lives. You can think back of the things that you've done. The way you spent your time and the way you spent your money.

And it's just, you want it buried. You don't want anyone to know it. You don't want anyone to see it. It's the shame of that old life. The shame of the dead heart. Where God gave you the gospel and you spurned it.

Your parents loved you and you spurned that parental gospel pushing upon you. God has rolled it away. He's given us a spirit.

And we have not received a circumcision physically. In the New Testament, it talks about that. Circumcision inwardly. It's done by Christ. He's given us a new heart.

[18:22] We're new creations in Christ. The old is gone. The new is here. All of the promises are now yes and amen and Christ.

And so in changing our hearts and cleansing us on that level, He's begun His work. In a way, we've crossed the Jordan. We've gone from death to life.

So shame has this terrible, debilitating effect. Shame can be one of the most difficult emotions and feelings.

and the past can be so powerful. In the gospel, God does not ignore our shame.

He does not ignore those things that we did. He does not just pretend like they're not there. He doesn't hide them away in a dark corner. Instead, He takes it away.

[19:29] He takes it by putting it upon His son and killing His son and burying that shame in the tomb of Jesus Christ. And so now, just like in circumcision, God was saying to Israel, the land is yours.

And circumcising our hearts, that is an inward sign and a seal that all of heaven is ours. What He began in us, He is going to complete. So God assures us, the past is gone.

And so brothers and sisters, are you wrestling with some sort of old shame? Jesus Christ came to take that shame. Whether you are guilty or innocent. And there are two different kinds of shame.

It's the shame of being guilty and the shame of being the innocent victim of someone else's sin. And Jesus Christ takes both. Because He was the innocent one who was then treated and counted as the guilty one.

And so in bearing our shame, it loses its power over us. And your past does not define you anymore. And God does not treat you according to what you have done to your past.

[20:40] And so God says, look up, look out. The future is yours. Heaven is yours. I am going to give it to you. If He began that work in us, He is going to get us there all the way home.

And so that's what God is saying when He says, circumcise the Israelites. That's the first word. It's this reassuring word that, you know what, the promise is all yours again. The land is going to be yours.

I promise it, just like I promised it to Abraham. Now it's to you. So that's the first word. The second word is Passover. And so they receive the sign of the covenant.

God is for them. God is going to bless them. And then two things happen. They celebrate Passover and then the manna stops. Both of these things are related to eating. But they are both about assurance as well.

So you remember the first Passover. You remember the circumstances of that. The angel of death, the angel of the Lord was coming through Egypt.

[21 : 45] And anywhere there was not blood over the doors, there was death. So in that Passover, He brought salvation to Israel. And He brought destruction to His enemies.

And so the Passover is also the sign, the seal. It's God's way of saying, I am your Savior. I am the one who, for the sake of blood, will pass over your sin.

But don't miss it. Passover the first time around was a sign of doom against God's enemies. Because in that first Passover, the Israelites were huddled in their houses.

They are huddled under the blood. They are eating their meal quickly. And the whole time, the clock is ticking on Egypt. Judgment passed over Israel.

And it fell on their enemies. So now here they are. Forty years later. They are ready to launch a holy war against God's enemies.

[22 : 52] enemies. And they celebrate the Passover. And the Passover, remember, has those two messages. I am your Savior.

I'm the one that passes over your sin for the sake of sacrifice. But other than that, I'm the one that judges your enemies. So here they are.

God's wrath is not on them. His anger has nothing with them to do. Love that song. But then, as they looked out over the hills of Palestine and down the coast at all those Canaanite kings, you look over it all and the dark judgment is hanging over their heads.

God is getting ready to judge His enemies and save His people. So they celebrate Passover. And the message is, I'm your Savior.

Watch what I'm going to do to these people. And then the next morning they woke up and there was no manna on the ground. First time in a long time. No manna on the ground. And they went out and they found food to eat.

[24 : 08] Where did they find that food? You think about that? Where did they find it? Well, they found it in the fields and in the storehouses and in the barns and maybe even the houses of God's enemies.

Their food is now Israel's food. Their barns are now Israel's barns. Their houses are now Israel's houses. Moses back in Deuteronomy said, the Lord will bring you into a land with large flourishing cities that you did not build.

The idea is, there's going to be these huge cities with all these houses and you're going to move right in. Filled with all kinds of good things that you did not provide. Wells that you did not dig and vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.

And so, that's what God said. And now at long last they're starting to eat what is theirs that belongs to them. They start enjoying it.

And so manna, as miraculous as it was, was for the wandering. It was for the walking. It's for the wilderness. But now it's over. And when the manna ends, that means you're home.

[25 : 24] They're home at last. Proverbs says, a longing fulfilled is sweet. So for, think about that. For years and years they had imagined what it's going to be like to be in the land.

To be enjoying what's in the land and not being out here in this desert. And now here they are. So how does God reassure them of his love in this Passover and this ending of the manna?

He says, my wrath has passed over you. Now it's hanging over your enemies. And then he gives them, it's like a housewarming present. The manna's done.

The road trip is over. Now they're eating food out of their own kitchen. So how does that speak to us? What does that have to do with us?

Well, the New Testament says our Passover lamb has been slain. So do we have to go into the Christian life wondering, is God for me?

[26 : 24] Is he holding my sin against me? Is it hovering over my head? His judgment? Is it ready to fall upon me? Our Passover lamb has been slain.

And it was during the Passover feast that Jesus died. And it was at the cross where God's wrath did pass over his people. Not in sign, not in symbol, like it did again and again in the Old Testament.

But once for all, it passed over. And surprise of surprises it lands on his son.

He was counted as the enemy. In order to save his people, he treated his son like Egypt. And so all the wrath that was due us fell upon him.

That's the love of God. That's the love of God. That's the love of God assuring us, saying, I'm for you. You're mine.

[27 : 32] I'm yours. We're going to fight this together. We're going through this together. I'm going to get you home. And so we don't and we shouldn't and we really, we can't live the Christian life like it's meant to be lived, wondering, is God's wrath hovering over me?

Is it hanging over my head? Is he against me? Dear sister, as far as the east is from the west so far as he removed your sin from you.

And dear brother, in the words of Paul, Christ redeemed us. He bought us out from under the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. So there's no longer any curse.

That sin has been removed as far as the east from the west. That's what it's talking about when it says our Passover lamb has been slain. So the dark shadow of God's fury has passed and so now mercy and grace will follow you all the days of your life.

So what is hanging over our heads? What is hanging over our heads? Mercy? Grace? What is ready to fall upon us?

[28 : 49] Mercy? Grace? Some poor Christians think God's wrath is dogging them. But we eat the bread and we say his body was broken for me.

And we drink the cup and we say his blood was shed for me. He died in order to give us life. To give us life. He didn't die so that you could be afraid and miserable all the days of your life wondering.

He died to set you free. He died that the joy of the Lord might be your strength. And so in the gospel just like in Joshua 5 the Lord says I love you.

I am for you. So do you need more of that? Do you need that sealed in your heart? Do you need convinced of that more in your hearts?

My word to you is pray. Pray for that greater sense of God's love. Pray that the truth of the gospel would win the day in your heart that fear might give way to freedom and joy.

[29 : 52] This is the Spirit's work. It is the Spirit's work to assure us. It's the Spirit's work to take the gospel truths that are true and so impress them upon our hearts that we know them to be true.

So pray. Pray for it. Ask for it. Plead for it. That's the second word is Passover. Now the third word is theophany.

Theophany, that's a fancy word. It's just a fancy way of saying that God shows up in a visible form. God becomes manifest in a visible form and that's what we have here at the end.

So now the deep, the breath is coming to an end. We're moving towards action. Passover has been celebrated. The people have been circumcised.

The men have been healed. From that. And so Joshua goes and he looks over at Jericho and what does he see as he looks? He sees a man with a sword drawn ready for action.

- [31 : 01] And Joshua asks, are you for us or for our enemies? And the answer, no. No. But as the commander of the army of the Lord I have now come. And Joshua falls down on his face.
- Well, who is it? It's the Lord. Joshua worships him and he doesn't refuse it. So that means it's no angel because angels always refuse worship in the Bible.
- They never receive worship. But God does. And when Thomas said, my Lord and my God, Jesus didn't say, no, you didn't get that quite right. You shouldn't be worshipping me.
- No, Jesus did not refuse it. And so here, now here's the commander of the army of the Lord with a drawn sword and Joshua is falling down on his face and the word is, take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy.
- Now, that's not the first time we heard those words, is it? All the way sort of back at the beginning of this story, of this whole Exodus story, Moses saw a burning bush.
- [32 : 10] saw this burning bush and he came up to it and wondering what it was and when he came close, the Lord said, take off your sandals. The place where you are standing is holy.
- And so from there, think about what happened. The Lord said, Moses, you're going to go to Pharaoh. You're going to, and through you, I'm going to save my people. I'm going to set them free. And so the Lord showed up and he set his people free.
- And the Lord showed up in ten plagues and judged his enemy. He made them his own. So now here we are again on the edge of battle, getting ready to confront the enemy and who shows up again?
- But God himself, the Lord. And now he's not as a burning bush but as a soldier, a general. But then there's this question.
- And I think this could really nag us because we doubt so easily. We wonder so easily. Why when Joshua asked, are you for us or for our enemies, does he say neither?
- [33 : 23] As the NIV has it. Or it's simply no. He says, no, I'm the commander of the armies of the Lord. And so is he neutral? Is he not for Israel?
- We can ask that question. Because don't we all in our unbelief harbor that doubt? I don't think maybe God isn't all for me. So that's where this question comes in.
- Is he neutral? Is he on Israel's side? Well I think the simple answer is that Joshua's question is the wrong question. So God says no. He's not saying I'm not for you.
- He's saying Joshua that's not the question. Do you ever do that with your kids? They're trying to ask you something and you just change the subject and you don't give them the answer they want. The point is not that question isn't the right question.
- That's not what we need to be thinking about here. Joshua's question missed the point. The Lord does not so much say neither as simply no. You see Joshua's wondering can I include this man in my army or not?
- [34 : 29] What am I going to do with this guy? That's the question. That's what Joshua is thinking. See how did we first meet Joshua? He's a general. He's a soldier.
- He's a man of action. He is used to quickly appraising understanding coming to sizing up armed men and deciding what he needs to do with them.
- But is that the point of it at all? No. This isn't about Joshua deciding what to do with this person.
- This is not, this isn't about Joshua recruiting this man to his cause. Rather, the Lord has come to recruit Joshua. The question isn't, am I on your side?
- The question is, are you on my side, Joshua? Because I've come as the commander of the armies of the Lord. Now Joshua, the question is not what you're going to do with me.

[35:34] The question is, what am I going to do with you? I've come to fight. Have you? And that puts the whole thing in its proper context.

It's not going to be up to Joshua and Israel to win this land. God is not leading from the rear or making the suggestion and then sending them to do it.

This isn't so much about Israel versus the Canaanites. This is the Lord versus his enemies. Now Joshua, on your face.

And with that I have a question. have you got this vision of things? Do you see that it's not so much what am I going to do with God as what is he going to do with me?

It's not can I recruit God to my cause? But have you fallen on your face and joined his cause? That's where salvation begins.

[36:48] When you fall on your face and you leave your causes behind you. And you join his cause. And Christian, what do you need to get ready to fight?

How do you live the Christian life? How tomorrow are we going to make it when we're fighting our flesh and the world and the devil? Real enemies enemies with real designs, real strength.

How are we going to get ready to fight? Well, we need to get on our face. And then and only then when he's up here, he's the commander and I'm the private, do we get things where they need to be.

And really only then do we have the confidence and the assurance that God is going to fight for us. So have you ever seen in your life, I've seen it in my life, have you seen it in your life, where you've been really trying to get God to help you to fight some battle.

You've been praying for something, only to find out the whole time it wasn't the right battle at all. I was hoping to recruit him to my cause.

[38:03] But meanwhile, where he was at, what he was trying to accomplish, what he was doing wasn't in my mind. God won't help us fight our battles when we think we are the generals and he is our army.

He will not help us fight our battles when I'm the master and he's the servant. But when I'm down on my face and I'm saying, not my will, but your will be done, that's when I have, when I'm fighting his battle, that's when there's this assurance, that's when there's this confidence, that I'm not going on my own, he sent me, and if he sent me, then he'll give me everything I need.

That's the hope, there's hope, there's confidence, that's every reason for cheerful obedience. When I've joined him in what he is doing, and that changes everything, that's assurance.

We can face all sorts of obstacles and difficulties and trials if we know, you know what, he's the one that sent me, I'm fighting his fight, this is what he wants me to do.

And so as Joshua and Israel, they're getting ready to begin their war, God meets them, and he rules away their shame, he gives them a fresh sign, you know what, this land, it's yours, I'm going to give it to you.

[39:31] And then they eat the Passover, they celebrate God as their savior, they get their hearts straightened out, Joshua, their leader, is on his face.

He's not fighting our war, we're fighting his war. And with that, next week we're going to see just how much of his war is it.

We're going to see God fight for his people. let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you that when we rise up against you and try to take the lead, that you are very patient with us, and you bear with us, and you bring us down, and even frustrating our plans is a mercy, because you know what you are doing.

Thank you that you are this all-wise commander, this all-powerful commander that has recruited us, that has rolled away our shame, that dealt so perfectly and so finally with our sin, that you've set us free.

Now, not to wonder is God for us, but with the assurance that we know that he is you are for us, and that you have sent us, and we are on your mission, with that confidence, with that hope, we can continue to fight.

[41 : 12] And so for those who are discouraged, for those who are losing hearts, I pray that these things would be an encouragement to them, that you would remind them that there is doom and curse upon all of their enemies, the devil, the world, they will all meet their end.

Thank you that you've said it, and it is true. Father, for those who are still trying to run their lives, and trying to be in charge of things, and hoping to maybe fit you in somewhere, I pray that you would show them that you're not going to fit in into their schedule, and their plan, and into their life, just the way they want it.

So please take the first place in their hearts, and overthrow self that is ruling so strongly in their own hearts.

I pray this in Jesus' name, for his sake, amen.