

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our ever-present Savior and leader, Jesus Christ.

Joshua 5:10-15

10 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. 11 And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. 12 Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year. 13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, " Are You for us or for our adversaries?" 14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 15 Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

I believe I can safely say that this sermon series on the Book of Joshua has been a great blessing to us. It's a book that gets a fair amount of attention in Sunday school and Bible class, but we don't see it in the pulpit too often. Yet, though it has great historical significance for us and for our faith, this book, because it is the word of God, is immediately essential for our spiritual welfare.

Did you notice a common thread throughout these sermons? The book is about Joshua—the great military leader and successor of Moses. Many believe that Joshua wrote the book himself—at least most of it. You would expect the name of Joshua to come up many times in these sermons. But it's never about him. He always take a back seat to another man that shares his same name. “Joshua” means “He saves,” the He being Jehovah, the Lord. Take that name down the pipeline of history for about 1200 years and subject it to some linguistic changes, and you come to the name “Jesus.” And that was the name that God's eternal Son took while He lived on this earth. Jesus lived up to His name. That is why our sermons, and any other sermon on any other portion of the Bible will focus on Him. Everyone else mentioned in the Bible are just players in His work of salvation.

Joshua, for his part, though he lived and died long before Jesus became flesh and lived and died for him, nonetheless MET Jesus in our account today. The Israelites, too, though they did not know when the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior would come about, were brought face to face with the grace and salvation of the Messiah.

Do you ever feel far off from Jesus? Do you regret that you can't see Him right here with your very eyes? Wouldn't that make things so much easier?

Or those of you who are like Joshua, appointed to lead the people of God from the pulpit or the class room—do you ever fear that it's just you standing between Satan and those whom you oversee?

Do not fear! Do not doubt that Jesus is right here, right now. He is manifest in the blessings of grace you receive every day, and He is there beside you in your fight against Satan, with the guarantee of victory. Yes,

Jesus Himself is Present—He Really is!

I. He hand-feeds you blessings

II. He hands you the victory

The Israelites had just crossed over the river Jordan, with God stopping the water to let them through. They were finally in the Promised Land! Now they stood before Jericho, the first city that God had commanded them to wipe out. They named their camp Gilgal, which means “rolling.” This is because the Lord told them when they reached this spot, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." The Exodus was coming to an end. God's promise was coming true.

The crossing of the Jordan was a big deal, and the coming destruction of Jericho was a big deal, but five great things also happened while they camped on the plain of Jericho.

The first is recorded in the section that comes before our text. The second generation of the Exodus was circumcised. The great multitude of men who had wandered in the wilderness received the God-commanded sign that they were chosen by God to be His people. It was the sign of their God-given faith in God's promise to Abraham that they would be a great nation, and that they would be blessed in so many ways. The most important way was that they would be declared righteous through faith because of the work of their Messiah.

The second great thing was the observance of the Passover. The last time they had celebrated the Passover was 39 years ago. The majority of the people that day had never observed it, and when they asked about it, they were told that it was done in remembrance of God's mercy. The Angel of the Lord passed over the homes of those who had painted their doorposts red with the blood of the unblemished lamb that they had slaughtered. That lamb looked forward to Christ, who went as a lamb silent before the slaughter to die for the sins of all people.

The third thing was the eating of unleavened bread. This was a festival God instituted to remember the days when they had nothing in Egypt, and how the Lord had delivered them and given them so much.

Fourth—and you might miss this if you blink—the Promised Land provided the food for these festivals. God's promise that this would be a land of plenty was certainly true!

Finally, the manna that the Lord had provided to the children of Israel ceased on that day. But there was no sadness. They had the riches of the land now. They didn't have to starve in a desert any more.

The Lord Himself was surely with them. Everything they had came as promised from the hand of the Lord. But, of course, everybody else receives material blessings from God. The people that were in that land already had been enjoying its fruits. What was different? That Passover meal is what made the difference. That meal showed them that they were in the presence of their Messiah. That lamb that died so that the Lord would passover their sins was a picture of Jesus Himself. In that meal they looked ahead to the Messiah, their Savior, and saw their sins washed away in His blood—years before it actually happened in that same land. Jesus Himself was present in that celebration on the plain of Jericho.

Jesus is present in that same way for you today. And even more so. That Passover meal was a predecessor to the Lord's Supper. Now that Jesus has ascended into heaven after dying for your sins and rising to seal the victory over sin, He actually comes into your presence—in His own flesh and blood—in the bread and wine of the sacrament. Jesus hand-feeds you forgiveness of sins by actually putting Himself in your hand. Like the Israelites before Christ came to earth, you have Jesus present with you after His return to heaven.

And He also gives you every other blessing. Yes, every blessing comes from Christ, but do we always recognize that? Manna was a great blessing for the children of Israel for forty years, yet they didn't always treat it like a blessing. They complained and rebelled against God because they didn't think it was enough. We do that, too. God gives us our daily bread, and we only look at the next guy and want what he has. Or we try to grab more than it allotted to us. God told those people to gather only what manna was needed for one day. Anything they gathered beyond that would be eaten by worms. He did this because He knew some would not trust that His blessing would come every day and try to take matters into their own hands.

Jesus warns us not to treasure up things on earth for ourselves, because they can be lost just like that—and they will eventually be lost on the day that He returns. We must not look at the things we have as just things. All that we have for our body and soul are gifts from God. When we look to God as our provider, we praise and thank Him for His wonderful goodness. Yes, Jesus is with us now showering us with gifts for our physical lives, but He has done more. He gives us His body and blood, shed for the remission of your sins. He did this not because you deserved it, or even because you wanted it. He did it out of love for you in your fallen state. He is here to save you and bring you into the Promised Land.

Joshua knew he was in no place to take things for granted. He was chosen to lead the people of Israel after Moses died. He had seen first hand just how difficult the job was for Moses. And he had the added responsibility of being their military commander. God had given him the task of wiping out the people of Canaan. That had to weigh heavy on his shoulders. The second part of our text sees him scoping out the city of Jericho that he was about to fight. Was he up for the task?

You are in constant battle with Satan and his army. There is no option but that he be defeated. Otherwise you are lost. Are you up for the task? Well, just as Jesus was there to reassure Joshua, He is also present now to tell you that that victory is already won. He is here to hand you the victory!

Every nation needs a military, and every military needs a commander. That commander needs to be extremely experienced and intelligent. He needs to know his fighting force like the back of his hand, and he needs to be well acquainted with war strategy. From what the Bible tells us about Joshua, he was definitely the man for the job. But the captain of the armed forces cannot be his own boss—otherwise you have a military state where the interest of the warlords are put above the welfare of the people. To prevent this, countries of the free world put ultimate military authority in the hands of the man that the people have selected as ruler of the whole country. So our commander-in-chief is the President, regardless of whether or not he has any military experience. The success or failure of the military ultimately falls on him.

God has the greatest army of all. He chose Joshua to lead His troops on earth, but Joshua was not the top ranking official. Above him he had the angels that God created to fight for His people. Even the angels have leaders among themselves. The Bible names Michael as the archangel. And still, beyond Michael, is the supreme commander to whom all angels bow down—our Lord Jesus Christ. This was Joshua's superior that he met on the plain of Jericho that night.

How do we know that this man standing there with His sword drawn and calling Himself the Commander of the army of the Lord was Jesus? Let's start at the end and walk backwards.

This Commander told Joshua to remove His sandals because he was on holy ground. This was the same voice that told Moses through the burning bush to do the same thing. Only the Lord can declare Himself holy.

Right before that, Joshua realized that this was no ordinary man, and bowed down and worshiped Him. If this were any other angel, that angel would have rebuked him for worshiping anyone other than God.

And before that, there was a more subtle proof. Joshua asked this unknown man whether he was on his side or on his enemies' side. That's not a 'yes' or 'no' question, but He answered, "No, but

as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Joshua understood that the only person superior to him in his job was the Lord Himself. He fell to his face and worshiped Him. That 'no' answer reminded him and it reminds us that Jesus' work is not about one group of people against another. He is not against anyone, but wants all men to be saved. He fights against Satan for all people and has beaten Satan for all people. This is not a man with a grudge against a different race of people. This is our God who wants all men to be saved.

Christ's presence before Joshua reminded him that his victory over the people of that land was as good as done. Jesus was the Hornet that God promised to send before Israel as they entered the Promised Land to destroy all of the tribes that lived there—no matter how powerful they seemed. Even more, He would destroy the powers of hell that sought to destroy their souls. After this meeting, Joshua could confidently lead the people in following their Savior—their Savior from the earthly enemies immediately before them, and the spiritual enemies that had always hounded them.

Jesus is present here now to encourage you in battle. No, you aren't fighting against other people, against flesh and blood. You are in constant warfare against Satan and all the sin and temptations he sends your way. Don't think you can fight on your own. You were born a citizen of Satan's nation, and though you have been made a citizen of heaven through baptism, Satan is always trying to fool you into thinking you're still in his army. So we daily push Jesus out of our presence so that we and our sinful nature can have some time on our own. Or we pretend that Jesus isn't right here, right now, and refuse to make others aware of His presence.

Be aware of your enemy's presence, but also be aware of Christ's presence. He has promised that He will be with you always to the end of the age. And He is! He is here to assure you that though battles still rage on in this life, the war is already won. Our great Commander-in-chief has beaten Satan and has rid you of the enemy of your own sinful flesh that made you an enemy of God. He took on that sin and became the archenemy of God in your place. He took all your sins into the grave with Him. Then He reinstated Himself as Commander of the army of the Lord by rising from the dead to hand over the victory to you.

You get the spoils. You get regular reminders of His grace and forgiveness and presence in the sacraments. You get daily reminders of His love for you when he hand-feeds you your daily bread. He personally hands the message that the victory is won every time you go to God's word. He gives you holiness to enter into heaven to be in His presence forever. You are not alone. It is not you against the world, sin and Satan. Jesus stands as an unbreakable wall between you and your adversaries and He stands beside you as a fount of every blessing. He gives you the victory over death, and He gives you blessings upon blessings onto life everlasting. Jesus is present today and forever—He really is.