

Oh Captain, My Captain!  
Joshua 5:13-6:7

### CHILDREN SINGING!

*I may never march in the infantry  
Ride in the cavalry  
Shoot the artillery  
I may never zoom o'er the enemy.  
But I'm in the Lord's army.*

Thus far we've seen Israel cross the Red Sea and the Jordan River; two crossings, to enter the Promised Land.

We also have 'two crossings' to enter the Promised Land.

*John 3:3 & 5 - ...unless one is born again...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

Israel came across and up out of the Jordan River to celebrate Passover and circumcision.

- a) Passover = Remembrance – We remember what God has done - Past
  - b) Circumcision = Rest – We recognize what only God can do – Present & Future
- \*See end of sermon notes for a word about circumcision

Summary: vs 10-12

- They came out of the Jordan River on the 10<sup>th</sup> day.
- They prepared themselves for the Passover for 3 days.
- On the 14<sup>th</sup> day they kept the Passover.
- The next day they ate from the land
- The next day, the manna ceased, and they ate of the fruit of the land

Israel ate of the fruit of the land, on the very same day, centuries later that Jesus became the first fruits of our salvation, by rising from the tomb.

*1 Corinthians 15:20 - Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Our hearts thrill for Israel as they inherit a 400-year old promise. We are also happy because we know the same God who kept his promise to Israel will keep his promises to us.

- The Egypt generation doubted God and was sentenced to 40-years of wanderings.
- That generation grumbled at God's gracious provision of manna in the wilderness.
- But this generation would eat the bounty of Canaan.
- That generation grumbled under Moses' leadership
- This generation obeyed Joshua's every command.
- That generation neglected circumcision, which is the sign and seal of the covenant.
- This generation willingly underwent circumcision while camped at Gilgal.
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During the lifetimes of this generation, Israel had become a great nation and the people were trusting in God instead of in their own strength to ensure the conquest of Canaan. This generation was not like that one which left Egypt...but they will become like that nation.

Our joy for Israel at Gilgal is moderated by how we know Israel will fail God in the Promised Land.

Gilgal is a place of resurrection, rejoicing, remembrance, rest, and now a place of revelation.

The city of Jericho is

- one of the oldest cities in the world
- continuously inhabited since the 8th millennium B.C.
- destroyed about 1400 B.C, a date corresponding to Israel's presence there
- the walled portion of the city took up about 7 acres.
- And it blocked Israel's way into Canaan.

Once across the Jordan River, Joshua meets a mysterious person -

*"When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" "And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped<sup>61</sup> and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" "And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.*

### **First: The Timing of the Meeting. V 8**

*When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.*

Circumcision removes faith in the flesh. This 'commander of the Lord's army' shows up at Jericho when the 40,000-man army cannot fight to remind Joshua that "the battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam 17:47).

This is an oft-repeated refrain throughout the Exodus and Joshua to remind Israel that it is God who has made them his peculiar people. It is God who has sustained them. It is God who will protect them. It is God who will win every battle in the Promised Land. He is giving them this land and it is important for them to remember that lest, in times of duress, they trust in the flesh.

**PICTURE** - Pablo Picasso was virtually unknown when he painted his famous portrait of American writer Gertrude Stein in 1906. (She coined the phrase "A rose is a rose is a rose.") She sat 90 times for this painting Picasso gave the portrait to Miss Stein since, as the artist himself recalled with a smile, at that time in his career "the difference between a gift and a sale was piddling." The painting is now worth 6 million dollars. Some years later, she was asked how much she paid for the painting. "Nothing," she replied. "He gave it to me." This Person has appeared to remind Joshua that God is giving Israel the land.

It may seem irrelevant, but as we'll see later, the timing, what happened both before and after the meeting is all-important.

### Second: Echoes of the Past

- a) Forty years earlier, Moses had a similar experience in Exodus 3:5
- b) When Moses met God on Sinai, God covered Moses's face and only let him see the backside of his glory (Ex 33:18-23)

Exodus 33:11 - *...the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.*

Now, Joshua encounters the God he longed to meet in the Person of Jesus.

- c) Jacob at Peniel in Genesis 32:22-32

Interestingly, Moses argued with God at the burning bush and Jacob wrestled with God at Peniel. Joshua worships.

### Third: Who is this Person? 14b-15

Exodus 23:20-23 - *“Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.” Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.” “But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.” “When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out...*

- a) This Angel has a drawn sword
- b) This Angel is not on the side of Joshua or his enemies
- c) This Angel is the ‘commander of the army of the Lord’
- d) Joshua fell to his face and worshipped him and the person doesn't refuse it

Revelation 1:17-18 - *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”*

Contrast that with -

Revelation 19:10 - *And the angel said<sup>o</sup> to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” “Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.”*

This angel does not refuse Joshua's worship.

It makes us wonder about other angels who have led God's army.

In 1 Chronicles 21, “Satan...incited David to number Israel...” = 1,570,000 sword-drawing men

1 Chronicles 21:16 - *And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem.*

2 Kings 19:35 - *And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.*

#### **Fourth: The Lord's Army. 14**

The name "Lord of hosts" occurs 261 times in the OT.

- Lord = Yahweh = self-existent one
- Host = Sabaoth = angelic armies

Matthew 26:53 - *Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*

#### **Fifth: Joshua's Response. 14a-15**

*"What does my lord say to his servant?"  
"And Joshua did so?"*

There is no other 'reasonable' response.

John 6:68 - *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,*

But will he do so?

Joshua 6:2 - *And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor."*

Israel's first battle in Canaan will be a demonstration of God's power and of God's grace. This victory will set the model for their future conquests.

But just as assuredly as they obey the Lord and win Jericho, they will disobey God and lose Ai.

#### **Sixth: Israel's Obedience. 6:1-7**

V 1 , we are given a description of the conditions in Jericho at the time of Israel's advance. "*Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.*"

As we read in chapter 2, the king of Jericho knew that two Israelite spies had entered the city, and he ordered the city's gates closed to keep the spies from escaping. Since the Israelites had miraculously crossed the river and at least 40,000 enemy soldiers were just a few miles away, the only hope the city of Jericho had to defeat the Israelites was to batten down the hatches (so to speak), to "shut up inside."

While the Israelite army was large, they did not have not the equipment used by armies of that period for conducting an attack on a fortified city. Without God, Jericho could have held-out from some time, effectively blocking Israel's way into Canaan.

VS 2-5

- a) Worship, not war will win Jericho

b) Seven days = the Feast of Unleavened Bread (for 7 days after Passover)

When Israel left Egypt, God said, “*Don’t even wait for your bread to rise.*” That’s the haste in which they left. Every succeeding year, after Passover, the Jews celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread for 7 days.

The act of marching around the city serves as a powerful memorial to the fact that not only did God rescue his people from their captivity in Egypt, he promised to give them the land of promise.

This is important for us. Like Israel, God doesn’t just save us to leave us in Egypt. He saves us, like Israel discovered with Rahab, to make his name known in the world.

**Romans 12:1 - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice***

Jericho has 7 days to watch Israel worship. They have 7 days to repent. Rahab has confessed that all the city knows what God has done to Egypt and 2 kings in the wilderness. There is no excuse for Jericho.

As well, Israel’s rest in God is important. Jericho’s fall not only sets the tone for God’s conquest of Canaan but is a preview of God’s ultimate victory.

**Revelation 19:11-21 - T**

**GOSPEL – Spurgeon’s Letter - CG Leaders – *As of Tuesday afternoon I am still looking for this letter. I hope to find it by Thursday afternoon when Debbie needs to create the PP and the bulletin outline. “When” I find it, I’ll send it to you.***

### **Conclusion:**

The sermon’s title comes from Walt Whitman’s Poem “O Captain! My Captain! which he wrote about the death of Abraham Lincoln after Lincoln had guided the nation through the Civil War to peace.

Can you say that Jesus is, not simply “O Captain!” but “My Captain!?”

Are you “in the Lord’s army?” Or are you commanding your own life?

Are you a Christian?

Are you a Christian who reserves some part of your life away from the Commander?

### **Community Groups:**

1 – Get to know your CG better. How? Read John 3:3 & 5. Tell us where you were born and how you were born again?

2 – Read Joshua 5:2-8. Why was circumcision important? **In this case, Israel had not circumcised their male children for 40 years even though it was a covenantal sign. The point of circumcision is to cut away what produces fleshly children as a reminder that it is God who makes his own children and more...it is God who produces the works of the Spirit. The first circumcision occurred right after God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.” How was this going to happen? Not by Abrahah’s ability to produce children, as in the case of Hagar and Ishmael. Oh no! God will produce his own children. Circumcision reminds us that salvation, sanctification and service are not products of our own doing but of**

God. This is why God orders Israel to circumcise their males, including the fighting men, just before He gives them Jericho. It is a reminder that God gives victory.

At the end of these questions, there is an entire section on circumcision

3 – Discuss and emphasize the importance of Israel eating of the fruit of the land on the very same day that Jesus rose from the dead, thousands of years later. What does it mean that Jesus is the ‘first fruits?’

4 – Talk about the timing of the meeting between Joshua and Jesus. What happened before? What happens after? Why is the timing of this meeting important? How do we apply this to our lives?

5 – What biblical evidence exists that the commander of the Lord’s army is Jesus?

6 – What was Moses’ response to God at the burning bush? What was Jacob’s response to God at Peniel? What is Joshua’s response to God at Gilgal? Which response is appropriate? Why do we respond as Moses or Jacob? How can we train ourselves to respond appropriately to God?

7 – Talk together about the importance of Israel walking around Jericho for 7 days. What did their obedience say about God? How did it terrify their enemies?

8 – Discuss the correlation between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Passover and walking around Jericho for 7 days and salvation and service? Make sure your CG sees what Israel is doing in the Exodus and in Canaan as a precursor/prefiguring of our walk with God.

9 – Read Revelation 19:11-21. Everyone in Jericho died except Rahab and her family. Who do we know outside of Christ? End your CG with a time of intercessory prayer. Encourage your CG to invite friends and family to the Fall Festival on Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup>.

### A Word about Circumcision

**CG Leaders:** The first part of Joshua 5 deals with circumcision. It is very important, but I just didn’t know how to preach a sermon on it with the children in the sanctuary. So, I’m leaving it to you to introduce your CGs to this very important spiritual concept found in Joshua 5.

Circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. Although the initial covenant was made in Genesis 15, circumcision wasn’t commanded until Genesis 17 – at least 13 years later, after Ishmael was born. At that time, God changed Abram’s name from Abram (“exalted father”) to Abraham (“father of a multitude”), a name that anticipated the fulfillment of God’s promise. The covenant was made with Abraham and later to Isaac and Jacob and to all their descendants.

It is a cutting away of the flesh on that part of the male which produces children. Hence, circumcision reminds us that only God can produce spiritual children and that the works of the flesh do not profit God’s kingdom.

There are at least two important NT references to circumcision that explain how the ritual was intended to be received, understood and applied by Israel and how it should be included in the NT Christian’s understanding of God’s grace and work in our lives.

First, the idea of “circumcision of the heart” is found in Romans 2:29. It refers to having a pure heart, separated unto God. Paul writes, “A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a

matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” Paul is discussing the role of the Old Testament Law as it relates to Christianity. He argues that Jewish circumcision is only an outward sign of being set apart to God. However, if the heart is sinful, then physical circumcision is of no avail. A circumcised body and a sinful heart are at odds with each other. Rather than focus on external rites, Paul focuses on the condition of the heart. Using circumcision as a metaphor, he says that only the Holy Spirit can purify a heart and set us apart to God. Ultimately, circumcision cannot make a person right with God; the Law is not enough. A person’s heart must change. Paul calls this change “circumcision of the heart.”

This concept was not original with the apostle Paul. As a Jew trained in the Law of Moses, he was certainly aware of this discussion from Deuteronomy 30. There, the Lord used the same metaphor to communicate His desire for a holy people: “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6). Physical circumcision was a sign of Israel’s covenant with God; circumcision of the heart, therefore, would indicate Israel’s being set apart to love God fully, inside and out.

John the Baptist warned the Pharisees against taking pride in their physical heritage and boasting in their circumcision: “Do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).

True “children of Abraham” are those who follow Abraham’s example of believing God (Genesis 15:6). Physical circumcision does not make one a child of God; faith does. Believers in Jesus Christ can truly say they are children of “Father Abraham.” “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

God has always wanted more from His people than just external conformity to a set of rules. He has always wanted them to possess a heart to love, know and follow Him. That’s why God is not concerned with a circumcision of the flesh. Even in the Old Testament, God’s priority was a spiritual circumcision of the heart: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done” (Jeremiah 4:4).

Second, Colossians 2:11-12 refers to this type of spiritual circumcision: “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” This circumcision does not involve the cutting of the body; it is a cutting away of our old nature. It is a spiritual act and refers to nothing less than salvation, effected by the Holy Spirit.

Both Testaments focus on the need for repentance and inward change in order to be right with God. In Jesus, the Law has been fulfilled (Matthew 5:17). Through Him, a person can be made right with God and receive eternal life (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). As Paul said, true circumcision is a matter of the heart, not made with hands but performed by the Spirit of God.