

**Title: Conditioned for Conquest**

**Text: Joshua 5**

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**Intro:**

I'm a Sports fanatic. Love them, all sorts. Love cheering on the good guys, rooting against the villains. Love stories that come out of it. Reminded this past little league season with my sons that the purpose for putting them in little league isn't necessarily to win games. It's to teach character. Of course I want the boys to learn skills, get better, and winning a few games is awesome. But more importantly, I want my kids to learn and practice character.

So I'm not sure if you've seen these video or any similar videos. There have been a few of these that have found their way onto the espn.com homepage or sportscenter, and sometimes you'll see them on facebook or whatever.

One video I'm thinking of is a girl softball player. The game is tied, bottom of the last inning. She hits a remarkable home run that will win the game, but as she is running around the bases, she pulls a muscle or rolls an ankle or something, so she can't stand on her foot anymore. The deal is though, if she can't make it to home, the run doesn't count. So the coolest thing is, is that the other team's players pick her up and carry her around the rest of the bases, all the way home to help her score the winning run.

See, I just love it. It almost makes me wanna cry when I watch it. For athletes like this young lady, character is more important than winning.

In our Joshua series- Be Strong- we've been talking about how God is leading Israel to take the land of Canaan, God leading Israel on the conquest of the Promised land.

The first 4 chapters of Joshua have focused primarily on the importance of Knowing God's word, on following God's directions and remembering what God has done, which Jim shared with us last week about building memorials and remembering the works of God in our lives.

Here in chapter 5- there is a transition. Chapters 5-12 will deal with the Israelites actually taking possession of the land.

Today, in chapter 5, a chapter I've titled Conditioned for Conquest, we'll see that the Israelites, they've crossed the Jordan river, they are sitting a mere 2 miles from the enemy, but instead of jumping into battle, God commands the Israelites to perform their final preparations before starting the war.

And what we'll see, is that God isn't necessarily concerned with their physical readiness and their military preparation as an army, but rather he's concerned about their spiritual preparation, about their relationship with their Savior, about His relationship with them as his covenant people, as his people.

**PRAY.**

**CONTRAST:**

There's a striking contrast that sets the tone for this chapter. It's in verses 1 and 2.

[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 sums up the past few weeks pretty well. All of these kings in Canaan, they've heard about what's happened. They've heard about

- Joshua leading the Israelites in to take possession of this land,
- they've heard about the power of the one true God,
- who has led the people out of Egypt,
- who dried up the Red Sea,
- who has provided manna for food everyday for 40 years,
- who stopped the Jordan River so the Israelites could cross over.

They've heard all of this about God, and v1 says their hearts have melted and there was no more spirit in them.

Now, we look and say that's it, that's how God's gonna give the Israelites the land, right? The kings are afraid, they're distracted, they're not thinking straight, their minds are clouded with fear, this is the perfect time for Israel to attack, hit them while they're down for the easy victory.

But God does something different here. [2] At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time."

Now, this is where we see that logic and faith don't always go hand and hand. And Joshua, as the leader of Israel, he's really got two choices here to choose from. He can choose to follow logic, which says hey man, the enemy is down- this is the time to strike! But faith, following God, it says no, stop and circumcise all of the men.

Circumcision had been practiced since the days of Abraham—it is the cutting off of the extra skin on the end of a man's baby-maker. In the book of Genesis, ch17, God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham, he said I will make you a great nation, the whole world will be blessed through you, I will give you this land. And as a sign of this covenant between God and Abraham, God commanded Abraham in Gen. 17:10-14

[10] This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. [11] You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. [12] He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, [13] both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. [14] Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

So I know, what's up with this circumcision thing right? I mean, logic says this is probably the best time to go attack. Why stop, why make knives out of rocks, not even real scapels, but just sharp rocks.

The reason why God calls for this really helps us understand God's nature and character. See, our logic and our mindset always leads us in a fevered hurry to do something for God, to go ahead and take the land, but God is more concerned about what you are becoming. Let me say that again. God is less concerned about what we do for him, and more concerned that we become something for him. God is more concerned about what you're becoming rather than what you're doing.

So as the Israelites are preparing to take hold of the land, God says no, let's stop for a minute. The land is of lesser importance than each of you growing deeper in your relationship with God.

So this becomes the stage for this message today. God is speaking to us to say- I'm more concerned about your spiritual growth than your service.

And as we look at the rest of this chapter, we'll see that God is less concerned at this point with giving the land to the Israelites, He's more concerned about doing a work in their lives. And we'll see three things about God's work in our lives.

## 1. GOD'S WORK REQUIRES COMMITMENT (V2-7)

First, their preparation **required commitment**. Verses 2-7 [2] At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." [3] So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. [4] And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. [5] Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. [6] For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. [7] So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

That is commitment. While obeying God may seem like an easy, simple action, obeying God in this instance was anything but easy or comfortable. There are at least two reasons why this would have been so difficult.

First, you gotta think about the pain. While this is an extremely sensitive subject, there is no sugar-coating it: It would be extremely painful for the men in the camp of Israel to be circumcised. The initial pain, the blood loss, and the soreness that would follow would definitely be discomfoting for the children of Israel, especially among the grown men, the men of war.

But secondly, think about how vulnerable this would leave the Israelites. Verse 1 says the Kings of Canaan knew the Israelites were in the land and they were fearful- so don't you think they would have been on red level alert? Defcon 1?

So, with the nations on high alert, God gave Joshua the most unusual command he could have given a general before entering a military campaign: Circumcise your men. In other words, disable your military for several days. What army could fight immediately after all the men were circumcised?

This is a situation that had played out in Israel's history. In Genesis 34, Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was raped by a man named Shechem, a Hivite. According to their customs, Shechem could marry Dinah if she chose.

An agreement for their marriage is reached with one stipulation: All the men with Shechem had to be circumcised. They agreed. Every man in the city was circumcised. Three days after their circumcision, Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, led a campaign against the city and killed every single man "when they were sore" (cf. Gen. 34:25).

So in order for God to prepare the Israelites to take the land, in order for God to prepare to use them, God's work in their lives required a commitment.

The Israelites had to have a strong faith that God was greater than their discomfort, God was greater than their pain, God was greater than their vulnerability, and that God was worth their sacrifice.

## 2. GOD'S WORK REMOVES THEIR DISGRACE (V8-9)

Secondly, After the commitment, after the pain and vulnerability, God **removes their disgrace.** [8] **When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. [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.**

Throughout the wilderness episode, we get hints that Egypt was bringing reproach or disgrace or shame against Israel because Israel had not yet made it into the Promised Land. We see this in at least three specific Old Testament places.

- Exodus 32:12 – God was going to destroy Israel for their sinful idolatry, but Moses interceded on their behalf. His argument was this: If you destroy Israel, then Egypt will say that you were not powerful enough to deliver on your promise; that you delivered them from Egyptian bondage just to destroy them in the wilderness.
- Numbers 14:13-16 – After the congregation rejected the report of Joshua and Caleb at Kadesh-barnea, God was going to destroy the nation, but, again Moses appealed to God on the basis that the nations will say God wasn't able bring them into the land; He wasn't able to perform what He promised His people.
- Deuteronomy 9:28 – Moses, in a sermon to Israel, spoke of how the land they came out of (Egypt) would watch them in the wilderness and scoff at God, contending that He wasn't able to deliver on His promise.

What happened in Israel was their disobedience brought dishonor to the name of God. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> sermon, he said that people will look at our good works and glorify the father which is in heaven (matthew 5:16). And if that is true, then certainly the opposite is true also: People will look at our disobedience and dishonor the Father who is in heaven.

This is what Egypt is doing. Man, their lives aren't any better than mine, why would I want to follow and serve God? I thought followers of God were supposed to be different?

So the "reproach of Egypt" was the ridicule and mocking Egypt made toward God. It wasn't about Israel; it was about God's ability to perform what He had promised. And now God has rolled it away. No longer does this characterize the people of Israel. God is able to forgive and restore His people.

You know, God still does this same thing, God is still the God who rolls away the reproach. Have you brought reproach or shame upon God and yourself through your actions since you've been a Christian? Have you committed acts so embarrassing and sinful that they still haunt you?

What should you do? Sincerely taken your sins to God, asked for forgiveness, and been cleansed of your sin, then you can rest in that fact that God has rolled away the reproach!

And lastly this morning, look at verses 10-12. [10] **While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. [11] And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. [12] And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.**

## 3. GOD'S WORK PRODUCES CELEBRATION

God's work in our lives, after requiring commitment, after bringing forgiveness, it **produces celebration.**

Immediately, we see the benefits of the Israelites going through the pain of circumcision- they were able to celebrate the passover. They had not celebrated the passover for many years.

In Exodus 12, when God gave Moses the instructions for passover, one of the necessary elements for taking passover was circumcision. You had to be circumcised to take part in passover. And now, because of what they have been through, they are now capable to celebrate passover.

Another aspect of celebration is seen in the fact that they began to reap the rewards of the promised land. V 11 says that the day after the passover, they were able to eat some of the produce of the land.

So the celebration of passover marked this significant turn in Israel's life. The time of wondering was over. The time of eating manna was over. The very next day the manna stopped because it was no longer necessary. It was now time to enjoy the blessings from God.

So what does all of this mean to you and I? See I believe that God is prepared to work through each one of us in here. I believe that God wants to see us conquer our own Canaans, Live victorious and live on mission, making an impact for God in the world around us.

But we have to understand- God is more concerned about what is happening inside of you than what you do for God.

So let me ask you- if God is more concerned about who we are becoming and less about what we are doing, who are you becoming for God right now?

Where is God stretching you and changing you that requires commitment, faith, pain, sacrifice? What kind of commitment and sacrifice are you making to God right now? Now don't get me wrong, I'm glad circumcision isn't a part of the deal to follow Jesus anymore.

The Butterball Turkey company set up a hotline to answer consumer questions about preparing holiday turkeys. One woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in her freezer for 23 years. The operator told her it might be safe if the freezer had been kept below 0 degrees the entire time.

But the operator warned the woman that, even if it were safe, the flavor had probably deteriorated, and she wouldn't recommend eating it. The caller replied, "That's what we thought. We'll just give it to the church."

I'm just thinking... How much of our Christianity is convenient? Showing up at church regularly, giving some money in the offering, serving in an easy and convenient way, praying before my meals,

At some point these are just things we do, there isn't any sacrifice or pain or vulnerability involved in that. Honestly, take those things away, and would your life really be any different?

Go to Gym- see ripped guys wearing t-shirt- no pain no gain. I don't have one of those. Building muscle requires pain. But the idea is true for faith, if we don't sacrifice, we won't grow. For Israel, their commitment required faith, required sacrifice, required pain.

I remember being asked by a mentor a while back, what have you done in the past week or month that actually required faith in God?

## CONCLUSION:

I think the point we learn from Joshua 5 is that if we want God to work in our lives, if we want God to do something in our hearts so he can do something in our lives, I think our commitment should be a sacrifice, should require a bit of difficulty.

Maybe this means that God is calling us to take our commitment to the next level.

Maybe for you, you need to fully surrender to God. Not just a part. Not just coming to God when you have made a mess of your life, but maybe you need to fully surrender to Him. That takes faith, that takes sacrifice. You need to invite him into every part of your life. You need to let God guide your marriage, guide your parenting, guide what you look at online, guide the way you spend your money

Maybe for you, maybe it's time to stop having a casual relationship with the church. What do you actually sacrifice to be a part of the church?

1 ½ hours Sunday morning doesn't sound like too difficult of a sacrifice. What about sacrificing time to be in a group? What about sacrificing time to serve? What if we spent the same amount of time complaining about the issues in helping to make things better?

Maybe for you, maybe it's time that you start giving to God financially. It's a step of faith, it's an act of worship. Or maybe, maybe you should stop giving to God out of the abundance of your blessing, and maybe you should be giving to God until you feel it actually affect the rest of your budget?

Maybe for you, your commitment should require vulnerability. Sometimes the most vulnerable thing for us to do is to actually talk to others about Jesus and the gospel, or even to invite someone to church. We fear rejection and what others will think of us. But isn't that the mission God has given us all, to go make disciples in all nations?

What commitment, what sacrifice, what thing do you need to do that actually requires you to put faith that God will carry you through?

I don't want to embarrass Steve, but I was talking with Steve Bernard a couple of weeks ago and he shared about a step of faith he took when he started volunteering at Rod's House. Vulnerability? Absolutely. Pain? Emotionally love these kids. Sacrifice involved, but well worth it.

How do we do this? How commitment that involves sacrifice, even pain and vulnerability? Look to our Savior. Perfect example of commitment.

Night before Jesus died, knowing what was in store for him the next day- he prayed in the Garden, if possible, take this cup from me. But Lord- not my will but yours.

And he committed to be used by God. He committed to the ultimate sacrifice, to pain to the point of death on the cross; to vulnerability to the point of being ridiculed and mocked by everyone around Him.

Why did he do that? He made this ultimate commitment so that through Him God would change the world. He made that commitment that so you could have a relationship with God. So you could be forgiven of your sins, so that you could be freed from your bondage and slavery to sin, so that you could one day be in Heaven for eternity with God.

And if he's done all that for us, maybe our commitment should move beyond convenience, maybe we should be willing to actually sacrifice in order for God to do something in our own lives, so that God can use us for His mission to make Christ known throughout the entire world. Amen?