**CIRCUMCISION AND PASSOVER AT GILGAL**

 September 1st, 2019

Joshua 5:1-15 / Key Verse 5:9, “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.”

Last week we learned that the Israelites set up 12 stones as the memorial stones for their crossing the Jordan river just like their ancestors who had crossed the Red sea on dry ground. It was indeed remarkable and awesome victory orchestrated by God plus the Israelites’ absolute obedience that they and their descendants must remember generation after generation. After this great victory the Israelites finally seemed to be ready to face the war to take possession of the Promised land starting from the war against Jericho; the first fortress of the Promised land. However, in today’s passage, before starting the war, God instructed three basics which are most important things for the Israelites and for General Joshua. They are *circumcision, keeping the Passover, and “Take off your sandals”*. Let’s learn what these three things mean.

1. **Circumcision at Gilgal (1-9)**

Verse 1 describes how the news of the Israelites’ crossing the Jordan river on dry ground affected the nations of Canaan. Let’s read verse 1. “Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted in fear and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.” From military point of view, when the opponents lose the courage to fight, they say that the destiny of the battle is already determined. So here we see the future victory of the Israelites even before fighting when they obeyed the word of God Almighty. But to God there was more important thing than the victory of the Israelites. What was it?

Let’s look at verses 2 &3. “At that time the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives and *circumcise* the Israelites again.’ So Joshua made flint knives and *circumcised* the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.” Verses 4-7 explain why God commanded Joshua to circumcise the Israelites again. According to Genesis 17:10-12, Circumcision was the sign of being God’s covenant people. Circumcision was done to Israelites’ ancestor Abraham first and it has been done to all the Israelites after him as a sign of being God’s people and as a sign of their identity as Israelites. So all those who came out of Egypt – all the men of military age who died in the wilderness had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt – so called, the 2nd generation - had not. Probably during the wilderness journey since they had to keep moving from one place to another, they could make excuse about being not circumcised or they just might have disobeyed God’s command. Either way, now it was the time of circumcision before God. To God, having right relationship with God through circumcision was more important than getting victory itself.

As you know, circumcision is very painful because they have to cut off the foreskin of the most sensitive part of a male organ. After circumcision, they cannot go to the washroom freely, not to mention fighting against enemy soldiers. For a week’s time they have to suffer from the pain of circumcision. So from human military point of view, God’s command to circumcise the Israelites could look very foolish. But in actuality, it was absolutely necessary and more important than victory itself. During the painful period of circumcision, they could meditate on the meaning of becoming God’s people. Just like they had to bear the pain originated by cutting off some part of foreskin of the most sensitive part of the body, in order to live as God’s people they have to bear pain; pain to give up their old life style and pain to live by new way of life directed by God’s instruction. Spiritually speaking, the pain of circumcision is the reminder for us that in order to live as God’s people we should bear the pain of giving up our old sinful behavior or bad habits or worldly dream-seeking mentality rather than seeking God’s will. So to us, circumcision can mean repentance; in another word, consecration of ourselves to have right relationship with God.

Let’s look at verses 8-9. “And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed. 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.” As you know, for 40 years of wilderness life, the Israelites had to learn how to live by faith alone in the word of God regardless of human condition or situation or environment. The first generation except Caleb and Joshua who came out of Egypt had died in the wilderness not being allowed to enter the Promised land because of their unbelief and disobedience to God’s word. Now the Israelites who are about to conquer the Promised land are their 2nd gen who were born during the wilderness journey. They learned faith and obedience through their ancestor’s failure. After 40 years of long wilderness training, under the leadership of General Joshua, they were so obedient in crossing the first impossible obstacle; the Jordan river without any complaining or rebellion. Now the whole nation obeyed God’s command for circumcision not in the reasonable peaceful time but right in front of impending war. This type of obedience really shows their pure absolute trust in God and true obedience from their heart. This whole national obedience indeed pleased God. So God said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away *the reproach of Egypt* from you.” Sometimes even after we started our Christian life, we see ourselves that we still have the lingering habit of our old slave mentality. Then we have to circumcise our hearts again before God through absolute obedience to God’s words from our heart. This is the very basic of Christian life we should repeat until we may grow fully mature before God free from the shame of our old life style.

1. **Passover at Gilgal (10-12)**

Look at verse 10, On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month which is 4 day later after circumcision, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. Notice that this Passover celebration was being kept for the first time after 40 years of long wilderness life. During the wilderness life since they had not entered the Promised land yet, there was no meaning of keeping the Passover. But now after crossing the Jordan, they are already in the territory of Canaanites; the plains of Jericho which is the part of the Promised land. Also through the whole national circumcision, they renewed their identity as God’s people. At this point, keeping the Passover gave another enormous significance to them. Why was it so?

It was because Passover was the reminder of God’s redemptive history for nation Israel. The Israelites had no way to be free from the slavery under Pharaoh’s oppression in Egypt. But by God’s great mercy and grace and by his mighty power, the Israelites was liberated from the slavery in Egypt. God punished Pharaoh by 10 plagues and the final 10th plague was to kill all the firstborn in Egypt from the very firstborn of king Pharaoh to even the firstborn of animals. But the Israelites was instructed to take some of the blood of lamb and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. And when the angel of the Lord saw the blood on the doorframes, he passed over the house. So all the Israelites who put the blood of lamb on the doorframes was exempt from God’s judgment on all the firstborn in Egypt. On that night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and finally released all the Israelites. The day was called Passover and on that Passover day, 600 thousand men on foot, besides women and children left Egypt. So the Passover was the very starting point of nation Israel; the day of liberation from slavery in Egypt. This day of liberation was possible solemnly by God’s grace alone. So celebrating the Passover was to remember God’s grace of salvation and redemption and consequently to remember the purpose of God’s redemption as well. God redeemed the Israelites to make them the kingdom of priest and holy nation as God’s people.

To us, remembering God’s grace of salvation through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is like celebrating the Passover. As a descendant of the first fallen man Adam, we were all doomed to live as a slave of sin and Satan. No matter how hard we made our efforts, we couldn’t make us righteous before perfectly holy God. However, the Son of God Jesus Christ was condemned on the cross shedding his holy blood in our place so that we could be forgiven and cleansed from our sins and liberated from the power of sin and Satan. Jesus made the perfect and everlasting Passover for us so that we may no longer live as slaves to sin and Satan but live as God’s holy and free children.

Every Christian has his or her personal Passover story in which they experienced God’s salvation through Bible study or some particular event. And it is very important to remember God’s grace of salvation always wherever they go or whatever they do or no matter what situation they are in because remembering God’s deliverance from slavery to sin is the very foundation of their new life as God’s holy and free children. When we remember the grace of God’s salvation, nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and as a result, we can be more than conquerors in any situation.

In verses 11 & 12, the day after the Passover, that very day, the Israelites ate some of the produce of the Canaan 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 the produce of Canaan. Manna which the Israelites had eaten for 40 years was the sign of God’s faithful provision during their 40 years of wilderness life. God would be faithful to the Israelites continually but not in the same manner as in the time of wilderness training but through enabling them to eat the produce of the Promised land. Now it was the time they should fight by faith to conquer the Promised land and to claim the produce from it.

1. **Take off your sandals (13-15)**

Let’s look at verses 13-14. 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?” In light of Joshua’ question, we can see Joshua’s current mindset as he must have pondered about impending war against Jericho. His mind was fixed on horizontal battle between two nations; the Israelites and the Israelite’s enemies. So his question was to confirm that anyone is for the Israelites or for the Israelites’ enemies. But unlike his expectation, the answer from a man standing in front of him was “Neither.” He replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua realized that his question itself was wrong. He fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” To hear his answer, let’s read verse 15. “The commander of the LORD’s army replied, ‘*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy*.’” The whole Israelites were circumcised to renew their identity as God’s covenant people and they celebrated the Passover to remember God’s grace of deliverance from their past slavery in Egypt. God himself declared that he rolled away the reproach of Egypt from the Israelites because of their absolute obedience. Nevertheless, there was still one thing which lacked especially in the Israelites’ leader General Joshua’s heart. It was his human view toward the impending war against Jericho. His concern was either for the Israelites or for the Israelites’ enemies. But to God what mattered was whether the battle was for God or not. To God, General Joshua should change his mindset completely from human point of view to God’s point of view. “*The place where you are standing is holy*” means, “your battle is not merely human battle between two nations but God’s holy battle.” Because the mission of conquering the Promised land is God’s mission, the mission should be considered as holy mission. If General Joshua was carrying out God’s holy mission, his attitude also should be holy. This is why the commander of the army of the LORD commanded him, “*Take off your sandals*.” In the war, “*taking off one’s sandals*” was considered as “*complete surrender*.” “*Complete surrender”* is the best way of making ourselves holy before God. It is to give up our dependence on ourselves or any other humans means. Instead, it is complete dependence on God alone. All the power and all the victory come from our complete surrender to God. Our Lord Jesus showed the best example of how he defeated the devil on the cross and became the King of kings and the Lord of lords. It was through his complete surrender to the Father God to the point of death on the cross.

In conclusion, we have one question as we are facing our new semester from next week. How can we be victorious in our new semester both spiritually and humanly? Through consecrating ourselves by the circumcision of our heart (in another word repentance), remembering our Lord Jesus’ saving grace, and completely humble surrender to God, we can be truly victorious. May God bless each of us to experience great victory in our new semester ministry as well as in our personal life! Amen.