

## Worship God

Jonathan K. Dodson | Joshua 5 | February 18, 2018

This passage has uncomfortable written all over it. Just when we thought Israel would finally move into the promised land they have to wait *painfully*. Let's look at Circumcision and *shame*, Passover and *peace*, Commander of the Lord and *our created purpose*, each one touches on deeply human and divine themes.

### Circumcision and Shame

After crossing the Jordan all Israelite men were to be circumcised. Seems like an odd thing to do after witnessing a great wonder of God. Why do it? A couple first century Jewish historians cite health benefits. Others say it was a way to make Israel unique, to set them apart. But many ANE peoples practiced circumcision, even some Canaanites. Verse 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.*" What's the reason? None of the new generation born during the wilderness wanderings had been circumcised, and it was required by law (Ex 12:48). So why circumcision? *Sheer obedience*. Shouldn't that be enough? To obey our God because he says so? To be true to the King, show allegiance to the God who makes pagan *kings* quiver? *Sheer obedience*. We give it to our bosses; we *expect* it of our children. *Why* do I have to do clean my room? Because your father said so. Parental authority. And yet, when it comes to *cosmic authority*, our Father in Heaven, suddenly authority isn't enough. I know You say so but but... Last week my daughter broke a glass and I angrily corrected her. My wife called me out, so I got angrier but denied it until I felt God's conviction. He sent me back to reconcile, but I didn't want to. Rationally I knew I shouldn't get angry about a broken glass, or get angrier when I'm caught, but internally I couldn't help it. I didn't want to be wrong, for God to be right; *I refused his authority*. Is God calling you to obey in some area? To yield to his authority? Don't delay! He deserves sheer obedience. *Why? Because of who he is, the Cosmic King*. And not just because of who he is but also because *of who we are*. For Israel, circumcision wasn't just an act of obedience; it was a reminder they *belonged* to God, not to themselves. A ritual reminder they were in covenant with YWHH, a mnemonic etched into their anatomy, reminding them who they are. Who are we? The NT *says it's not circumcision or uncircumcision that matters but being a new creation in Christ Jesus*, that's what matters; that's who you are, God's new creation, a new person, with a new identity, and a new allegiance (Gal 6:17). So *we* should obey God also because of who we are. It's not *just sheer obedience*, though it could be; it's *obedience based on our true selves*: child of God, new creation. ILL. Joshua takes the reason for circumcision even deeper, "*Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you*" (5:9). The word reproach can be translated **shame** or disgrace. What shame is he thinking of? He's probably thinking of the shame conferred on Israel by Egypt (see Dt 9:28). Look at those losers; they broke away from us but now they're doing circles in the wilderness. God has abandoned them. This is old creation thinking, conditioning by shame. Shame can operate in the background in our relationships. A husband shares something in social setting, but his wife blurts out how he's wrong, doesn't know what he's talking about, puts him down in front of everyone. Why do it? She's ashamed of how he made her look. Husband, seems like a great guy in public, but

behind closed doors says to his wife, “Are you really going to eat that? Did you work out this week? You need to lose weight.” Thoughtlessly tossing stones. Why? Maybe he wants to look better in front of friends. That kind of shame sticks, and can be hard to get out of your head, and some shame follows us from our old life into our new life in Christ, hanging on us like a backpack filled with stones. This text is God telling you he wants to roll away the shame, relieve the weight, remove the stones. God says, in essence, I don’t care how you make me look, what I care about is how I make you look. He says, put on Christ and make no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14), buy from me white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen” (Rev 3:18). Listen to my voice, not the other voices. I’ve rolled away your shame, clothed you in white, fit you with my own righteousness. So when we hear the voice of shame rising, shut it up with this: “Today, I have rolled away your shame!”

### Passover and Satisfying Peace

Next, Israel celebrates Passover. Passover was instituted when Israel was in Egypt. Moses told them to put the blood of a lamb on the doorpost of their homes. Then, at night the angel of death swept through Egypt exacting a death sentence from the firstborn in every home without the blood, but “passed over” homes with the blood. Those with the blood, life; those without the blood, death. Now this may seem backward and cruel. Why so steep a punishment? Well, Pharaoh set himself up as a god, rival to YHWH. He constructed an entire empire of self-worship, and used God’s people to do it. Ever do that, use the church, bend it toward your need, your preference? Consider the crime—cosmic treason, mutiny against the Creator—a crime *we all commit* in our own empires of self-worship. Punishment must fit the crime. If the crime is cosmic, not just against one’s country but against one’s Creator, then the punishment has to be huge. There’s nothing bigger than death. So the angel seeks blood, and when he finds it he spares, but when he doesn’t he takes. Justice served....or is it? If you think about it the one doing *Israel’s* time is an animal *not* a human, which can only *defer* God’s wrath. You can defer your school loans but eventually you have to pay every last cent. But in a stroke of mercy, God pays. He gives his own firstborn so we can live. Three days later rises from the dead to secure new life for all who hope in him. Israel, of course, doesn’t quite grasp all of this, *but they do remember God’s mercy and justice, and how it led to their release from slavery, and now from wilderness.* So, their exodus into the promised land is followed by a feast, which is really significant because they’ve been eating the same meal every single day for the last forty years! Now they eat fresh, produce from the land, unleavened cakes, parched grain—the fruit of the land. They celebrate what God has done, and so should we! As verse 12 says, the manna has ceased. Repeats twice. Why? Here it is: And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Deut 8:3). Daily bread was a continual reminder *true sustenance comes from the mouth of God.* In fact, Jesus called *himself* the bread of life. There’s your feast! I was out for a couple months recovering from surgery, and a friend who hadn’t seen me in a while said lets go out to eat when you’re back and catch up. He picked the restaurant, and when I showed up I was a tad intimidated. Swanky, owned by a famous chef in town, and the food was incredible. We even ate from the little dim-sum cart that came

by, ordered dessert, drinks the whole nine yards and had a great time catching up. We *celebrated*...and then the check came...and my friend said, "It's on me." He threw me a coming home party, pulled out all the stops just like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have for you to celebrate your return: removal of shame, redemption from wrath, new identity as his new creation. He's throws you a party, clothes you with his best robes, puts a ring on your finger and said, "Check please." It's all on him. Are you feasting on *him*? Are living on his words? Celebrating Christ? I recently gave a struggling neighbor unfamiliar with Christianity a copy of the Bible. After a couple days I checked in with her to see how it was going. She shared with me that she had been reading fifteen minutes a day, but that in the evenings when she couldn't sleep she found herself reading for hours. She told me, "It's really beautiful. Even though I don't understand it all; it fills me with peace." Feast on Christ, live on his Word, every word that comes out of his mouth. Then you'll have life and peace.

### Total Worship

In our closing scene, Joshua lifts his eyes to see a warrior in the distance, sword drawn. He approaches him cautiously, "[Are you for us, or for our adversaries?](#)" The warrior says, "No." He slaps the drink out of his hand, grabs Joshua by the lapels, and says you have no idea who you're talking to. He doesn't admit Joshua's categories—for or against—because he's no mere soldier; he's of a higher order: "[I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come](#)" (5:13–14). Who is he? The word translated commander is used of captains, princes, and even the angel of the Lord, a figure in Exodus who leads Israel and bears God's authority. How does Joshua respond? Throws himself at the Commander's feet. Some think this commander is an angel, but angels don't receive worship. In Rev 22 John sees an angel and throws himself down in worship. But the angel responds, "[You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God](#)" (Re 22:8–9). Worship God. The commander is a manifestation of God, perhaps a pre-incarnate Christ, who will one day lead the armies of the Lord to judge the quick and the dead, and he will seek the blood—yours or Christ's. Joshua inquires, what would you have me do? "[Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.](#)" And Joshua did so" (5:15). *Sheer obedience is worship*. It's as if he saying, Make no mistake Joshua, you are just a man, and the land you will inherit is not your land. It is my land for I am Lord of heaven and earth, and this will be *my dwelling place*. What do I want? Head to toe worship. Total devotion. Are you holding back? Remember who God is. Are you lingering in shame? Remember who you are. Are you longing for peace and joy? Feast on Christ. Worship yourself and you'll lose your life; worship Christ and you'll gain it. *Worship God*.