

**Pastor Kyle Mercer**  
What to Do While We Wait

February 12, 2023  
Series: Taking Ground  
Joshua 5

**BIG IDEA – WHAT DO WE DO WHILE WE WAIT?**

My name is Kyle. Welcome to Two Cities Church. What you saw in that video is you saw James. He's one of our missionaries, and he's in the middle of nowhere in South Asia. You saw what was behind him. What they're doing there is reaching UPGs. If you don't know what a UPG is, that's okay. When you become a Christian, you get a new vocabulary, so let me give you a new phrase.

*UPG* stands for unreached people group. When you see where they're standing in that video, they are in a place where there are no believers, there is no Bible in their language, and there is no building that would hold a church near them. So, we sent a team of six men. Here's what I'm so excited about. Five of them were from the same Community Group. None of them were from our staff.

They went to serve the full-time missionaries there for a week, and they saw people come to Christ and be baptized. It was incredibly exciting. Here's what I want you to know if you're new, you're checking us out, or maybe have been around for a while. We are all about world missions. We care about the neighborhood and the nations, the carpool line and the Congo. We care about all of it.

You might ask, "Okay. Why are we sending people?" Here's the reason: we go because Jesus Christ first came for us. That's what motivates our going: his coming. He was actually the first to go. He was the first to leave a family and leave a place and travel a long distance to reach a people, and now we just do that in response.

In fact, here's how we think about missions here. Missions exist because worship doesn't. That's what John Piper said years ago. Missions is just a means to a greater end, which is worship. So, why are we showing you this video? Hear me say this. I'm taking a whole beginning of a sermon just to tell you this.

We really want you to go on a short-term mission trip in the next few years. You look around here (every service is like this) and go, "This would be a logistical nightmare." Make it hard on us. Make us have to book more trips. Make us have to send more teams. Make us have to raise up more leaders, because there's just something special when you taste mission overseas.

I've had multiple experiences of doing this, and one of my hopes is to take each one of my three kids overseas before they graduate high school. My wife Margy and I are going to Uganda this summer to deepen our partnership with Compassion, because it's good for my heart and soul to be overseas and see real spiritual and financial poverty and taste mission. I hope you'll do the same. This is our heart.

We always talk about this. Our sending capacity (which is sending church plants and mission teams and all that you saw there) is more important than our seating capacity, but our seating capacity comes first in making room for our sending capacity. If you'll look around here... Guys, last night, at our Saturday night service, it was the highest attended service in the history of our church.

Maybe it was partly the Super Bowl. I don't know. The committed Sunday night crew moved to Saturday. I don't know. It was very exciting. Then last service, now *this* service... What we're seeing... I've never seen this happen in any church I've ever been a part of. We now have more people coming to every service than we have seats in that service. Last night, they were pulling chairs out of that hallway because they ran out of seats in the lobby.

So, why am I telling you all this? I want to say this in the most humble, Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, winsome way. If you have been coming around... I'm not talking about first-time guests. I'm not talking you're here to see someone's baptism. I'm not talking you're checking our church out for the first time. I'm not talking you're not a believer and someone brought you and you're a seeker and a skeptic.

There is a group of you, and you guys come around, and you're takers and not givers. You're consumers, not contributors, and this is one of three churches you rotate going to. We need your seat. Now, I'm not here to beat you up; I'm here to build you up. I actually hope you hear this and go, "No. I don't want to..." Who wants to raise their hand and say, "I want to be a taker, not a giver"?

"I want to give nothing, serve nobody, and connect with nobody in this church." No one wants to admit that. Our hope is everybody gets in because we are on... This is the year of leaping. We are heading into this new home and hub, and we want to take all of you with us if you want to be all in, but we have more people wanting to be here than we have seats, so, if you're not all in...we love you...maybe we'll see you in the new building.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to pray, and if you are a taker and not a giver, I'm going to pray long enough for you to slip out during this prayer, but I hope, more than that, all of you will lean in as we head into Joshua, chapter 5. Let's pray.

Lord, what motivates our going is that you came, and what motivates our discipleship is your call to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you. I don't know how anybody could read that and fall into consumer Christianity, but, Lord, not just in our church, in every church in America, there are just consumers. I pray against that spirit. I pray for the spirit of contributing.

I pray there would be no freeloaders in this church, that everybody would be all in with their time, talent, and treasure as we are moving to a new home and hub, which will be a beacon of witness and worship in our city, Lord. So, would you call all of us up and in in this moment as we head toward this new season as a church? We pray this in your name, amen.

Guys, we live in the age of Amazon. I bet you're on that website all the time. It's a website. It's a company. It's an empire. What Amazon has figured out, and maybe what Amazon has tapped into (I don't know how to say it exactly), is that you and I don't like to wait. I mean, that's what makes Amazon unique. They were the first people to be like, "Join Prime," which now we all have, "and anything you order from anywhere in the world will be to your house in two days."

In fact, this is what's happening now, for me at least. When I'm buying something on Amazon, it says, "If you order in the next 5 hours, 41 minutes, and 12 seconds, you can have this tomorrow." Yeah. Who wants to wait two days for this? Right? Or do you ever order six different things, and then it says, "We could give them all to you in two days or we could ship them separately and you'll get some tomorrow"? It's like, "Of course I want some of these tomorrow! I don't want to wait until the next day."

We don't like to wait. How many of you are so frustrated anytime you have to deal with traffic? Do you know what the Greek word for *wait* is? *DMV*. Have you ever been there? Guys, they did a study to basically see how long people will wait before they say something. They found out that if you're talking on the phone really loudly or talking in a movie theater, people wait about two minutes before they say, "Shh!" They don't want to be rude.

They found out if it's a crying baby, they'll wait an extra minute. They found out that people, because they like their Starbucks and they like their drink and they know it's busy, will wait up to seven minutes in a line before complaining or looking around or asking what's going on. The average husband will wait 21 minutes for his wife to get ready before he says, "Honey? I don't want to start a fight on our way to this, but one of us is taking too long."

We'll wait 20 minutes in TSA before we say we have to get through, and we'll wait (I don't know what this says about our city, a medical city) 32 minutes at a doctor's office before we ask, "What's going on, and is the doctor ready to see me?" Guys, we don't like to wait, and if you'll turn to Joshua 5, the people have to wait...not at the DMV, not in the Starbucks line. They're having to wait on God's promises, and that's the type of waiting you're going to have to do.

Some of you are single, and you're waiting on a spouse. Some of you are infertile, and you're waiting on kids. Some of you are sick, and you're waiting on healing. We're all waiting to see the promises of God realized. What's very interesting (we'll see this) is on both sides of the Jordan... So, in Joshua 3, remember, they get to the Jordan and he says, "All right. It's time to camp here for three days." It's like, "We're here. Let's go. I don't want to wait." So, they had to wait on *that* side.

Then, we'll see *this* week, in chapter 5, they get to the other side of the Jordan, and it appears, from what we can put together from the text, they have to wait two weeks in the Promised Land before they fight their first battle at Jericho. So, what we're going to look at today... Here's the theme of Joshua 5: *What do you do while you wait?* It depends on what type of waiting. Right?

Here's the most common type of waiting: *delays*. This is why you don't like to fly. For me, I like to fly out of Charlotte because I don't like to connect because I don't want to wait any longer. What happens with a delay is something outside of you is making you wait. So, that's one type of waiting.

Then there's *lingering*. We don't use that word a lot. *Lingering* is when you're waiting on purpose because you don't want to leave. Usually, when you start dating someone... When Margy and I started dating, we had epically long dates because neither of us wanted to leave. It was like, "Let's eat dessert...again. Let's just drive around and talk to each other...again." Neither of us wanted to leave. It's lingering.

Sometimes we wait and it's *procrastinating*. I'm the one waiting. I'm the one stopping things. I'm the one holding on. You'll know you're procrastinating because you'll start to do a bunch of other things. You'll watch yourself. "I'm cleaning the kitchen again instead of making the phone call I need to make." The type of waiting today is the type of waiting that prepares you for your next battle.

If you'll turn to Joshua, chapter 5, verse 1, I'm going to show you four things from the text today on what we do while we wait. Verse 1: "***As soon as all the kings of the Amorites...***" Those are the enemies of the people of God. "***...who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites...***" Those are other enemies. We have two groups of enemies.

***"...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..."*** Look at this. This is speaking of what happened to their enemies. ***"...their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel."***

The first thing you need to know while you wait is you need to have a different *perspective* on how your enemies view you. Do you see this? Here's what's interesting in the history of Israel. Remember, they send the spies out. I don't want to retell you that whole story, but the 12 spies go out. Remember, the 10 who come back with a negative report basically say, "These guys are really big, and we're really scared of them."

Then when you read Deuteronomy and Numbers, you actually realize, "Wait a second. God's enemies were more scared of God's people than God's people were scared of them." Okay. Here's the question: Who are you afraid of who's actually more afraid of you? I don't mean this in some kind of self-help, triumphal way. Here's what I mean: the Bible says that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. The Bible says the same spirit that rose Christ from the dead lives in us.

Part of what the Christian mentality is is I have to stop freezing and being afraid of my enemies, and I need to start moving toward them. Now, when I say "enemies," what am I talking about? Our enemies, by the way, are not other people. The Bible gives us three enemies. We have a spiritual enemy (Satan), an internal enemy (our flesh), and an external enemy (the world). I don't mean the people of the world; I mean the value system of the world.

Tonight is the Super Bowl. What's every sponsored ad going to be on the Super Bowl? A value system of the world trying to tell you why you're not satisfied with what you have and who you are. What Satan does is he takes a value system or a lie of the world, and he knows what's going to appeal to your flesh. This is why different temptations hit different people differently. Satan, our spiritual enemy, takes a value system and applies it to our flesh.

So, I just want to encourage you at the beginning to realize that because... Not because of you. Definitely not because of you or because of me. Not because of *who* you are, but because of *whose* you are, you can actually fight the battles, by faith and grace, that God wants you to fight. A very short point, but I wanted you to understand this chapter opens up with how they needed to have a different perspective on the enemies they were fighting.

## **01 WHILE WE WAIT...REMEMBER WE ARE A MARKED PEOPLE**

Secondly (where we're going to camp out), they needed a *procedure*. Think of it *this* way. These are all going to be *Ps*. I hope you appreciate that. First, it was a new *perspective*. Now they need a *procedure*. This is going to get interesting. Look at this. Verse 2: "***At that time the LORD said to Joshua...***" Remember, they're in the new land. Joshua is like, "I'm ready to fight. Let's go. I've got the guys. I've got the people. I've got the swords."

***"At that time the LORD said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives...'"*** Joshua is like, "We don't need knives. I have swords. We'll fight the battle *that* way." Not for that purpose, Joshua. "***...and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time.***" Yikes! On the top of the list of things I was not expecting were going to be interesting about being a pastor was how much I'd have to talk about circumcision.

I'm in Genesis, we're talking about circumcision. I'm in Exodus, we're talking about circumcision. I'm in Galatians, we're talking about circumcision. Get ready to talk about circumcision just for a few minutes here. I have to get kind of specific because it's kind of important. A couple of things about circumcision.

So, why circumcision? I've told you before it's God's way to say, "I'm going to be involved in the parts of you, in the places that are most sensitive and most intimate in your life, and the places you don't want me to be involved." Let me tell you what circumcision means. God wanted to mark the body to avoid hyper-spirituality.

A lot of times, we want to say, "Oh, yeah, I'm devoted to the Lord." Is your body devoted to the Lord? "Oh, yeah, God saved my soul." Okay. Are you going to live for him in your body? Now, why *that* part of the male body? Because here's what God is saying: "If that part of a man is devoted to me, all of the man will be devoted to me." Everybody knows that's true. "If that part of the man is *not* devoted to me, he's really just playing games, and he's not really all in, because that's what he cares about most."

The second thing... Why circumcision? Why on that part of the man's body? It's because it's that part of a man's body that produces the next generation, and God wanted the husband and the wife to have a visible reminder that when they have kids, they're supposed to have godly kids.

I have to get up here every once in a while and talk about the goodness of kids, and we should all want to have kids. That's a new idea that people wouldn't want to have kids. Back then, everyone wanted to have kids. Circumcision was a reminder, "You're supposed to have godly kids." Not just polite kids, not just good-looking kids, not just kids who excel academically and athletically, but godly kids.

The third is it was God's way to mark them, just as a mark on their body, so that they would remember they're special, they're separated, and they're significant. Now, when we read this, we go... I always think of what the modern person would say. The modern person would say something like, "Oh, isn't that so silly that back then people marked their bodies?" We still do this today. What are tattoos all about?

Can a Christian get a tattoo? Well, Jesus has a tattoo in Revelation 19. It says, "Lord of Lords and King of Kings." It's on his thigh. So, can a Christian get a tattoo? Yes. Do I have any? No, I don't, but you can get them. Here's the interesting thing about tattoos. Tattoos have three elements that remind us of circumcision. Tattoos are *painful*, *permanent*, and *personal*.

I talked to people this last week about tattoos, and I was like, "Would you want to get a tattoo if it wasn't painful?" They were like, "No." Oh, interesting. The pain is part of the process. The pain is part of the honor. The pain is part of the story. I wouldn't want it if it wasn't painful. What if it wasn't permanent? This is why we're okay when our kid puts a Super Mario Bros. washable tattoo on their forehead. You're like, "Oh, gosh. Okay, 30 minutes and a hot rag will get that off."

I asked, "Would you want that tattoo if it was only going to last for a year or 10 years?" "No, no. This is permanent." Then it's always personal. No one just gets "Live, laugh, love" on their back. If you got that tattoo, repent. Everybody gets something personal...my wife's name, the day my dad died, a Scripture verse, a Hebrew word. It's all about the painful, the permanent, and the personal. It's interesting because that's exactly what circumcision was.

Today, we're a little bit more sophisticated, so we learn to mark our bodies even by the clothes we wear. What's up with this new athleisure wear? I know what some of you are thinking. "Kyle, that's how *you* dress sometimes." It *is* how I dress sometimes. Athleisure wear says, "I like to dress nicely, but at any moment I could go to the gym, and I just might." That's what I'm saying.

How about outerwear? Everybody dresses like they're headed to Boone. It's like, "Come on. You never go to Boone." The Patagonia... We have a pastor on our staff, and the other day he showed up wearing a North Face vest. This kind of shows you how things go out of style. He showed up with a North Face vest. The next day, he showed up with a North Face jacket. I said, "Dude, if 2004 comes back, you're ready." He laughed and I laughed, because these things go out of style.

Remember when Oakleys were cool? Are some of you old enough? Then Ray-Bans were cool. Now Maui Jims are cool. Guys, this happens with cups. I was at a pastors' event a couple of weeks ago, and as the gift, they gave us Tervis tumblers. I was like, "This is like 20 years old. Of course pastors would give pastors that gift. This is so

uncool." The Tervis tumbler was cool, and then the Yeti was cool, and then the Hydro Flask was cool. Now how many of you ladies (don't raise your hand) have a Stanley cup? I'm not talking about the hockey tournament. We want to mark ourselves.

To get serious for a moment, what is the gender personal pronoun debate all about? By the way, I'm not picking this fight. The church isn't picking this fight about gender personal pronouns. On the front page of the *New York Times* three weeks ago, there was a total front-page article on personal preferred gender pronouns.

What was interesting was it was all about the New York liberal elites who don't like it. *They're* even like, "What's going on? I'm sending my second grader to school. That's what I want them to learn. I don't want them to experience ideology and the gender spectrum in second grade."

What are pronouns about? We know what they're about. "I need to mark myself, and I need to make sure that everybody who ever speaks to me marks me exactly how I want to be marked, which is different than how I look, so it'll be confusing to everybody, but you'll have to remember it."

I want to show you what happens next. Verse 3: ***"So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth."*** Do you know what that literally means in the Hebrew? The hill of the foreskins. Some of you are like, "That's a terrible neighborhood name."

Some of you are like, "I bought a house in the hill of foreskins. I can't sell it. All of the housing prices are going down in this part of the neighborhood." They called it the *hill of the foreskins*, because when you have a couple hundred thousand men get circumcised, it becomes the hill of the foreskins. So, this is what happened here. It's in the Bible. 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. 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."***

So, there are two generations. The older generation is circumcised. The younger generation is not circumcised. Verse 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."***



So, here's what he basically says: "I need to circumcise this next generation because they weren't circumcised in the wilderness, but the older generation..." He goes out of the way to say they were circumcised, so they had the outward mark, but they didn't have the inward transformation. That was the older generation. We call that generation here at Two Cities *religiously lost*.

Here's what the apostle Paul says: there are people who have a form of godliness but no power. They were baptized in a church a long time ago, but they don't really believe. They're in church, but they're not in Christ. It's an interesting thought. I've now lived in central North Carolina longer than I lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for 18 years.

I've lived in central North Carolina for 20 years, first Burlington, then Greensboro, then Durham, and now here. Winston is far and away the most religiously lost city I have ever seen. People go to church to see others and be seen, not to see God. I think one of the main ways we have the outward mark is we have the religious language, even if we don't have the heart change.

I was recently with a group of pastors. It was a connecting event for a group of pastors. There were eight of us. They took us clay shooting. So, we go out to shoot some clay, and the guy who owns the clay shooting place comes out. He sees a group of eight guys hanging out together, so he immediately starts telling dirty jokes and stories about how he has been promiscuous and how he's sleeping around.

I'm thinking, "This is about to get super awkward." One of the other pastors looks at me and goes, "Should we tell him?" I said, "Let's just see." Then after he finishes all that, he goes, "So, what do y'all do?" It was like, "Oh." So we tell him in the nicest way possible, no judgment. "Hey, we're actually a group of pastors." He got spiritual and religious so quickly. People can turn it on.

The first thing, he goes, "I teach Sunday school." I was like, "Where? I need to warn people. You teach Sunday school?" He was talking about answers to prayer, and I'm just like, "Wow." How many people, especially if they grew up in a Christian home, a Christian church, can turn on the religious language?

Well, the people needed to be circumcised, but look at what happens. Verse 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."*** It's worth saying that, obviously, in the New Testament, circumcision is a circumcision of the heart. I've told you that before.

What is the mark of being a believer? What is the mark of God in the New Testament? Ephesians 1:13 says we are marked, or sealed, by the Holy Spirit. So, it's not

something God does *to* us; it's a person God puts *in* us. If you want to know what the mark of being a believer in the New Testament is, the answer is a changed and transformed life by the Holy Spirit...new affections, new desires.

Here's what happens during the circumcision. Verse 8: ***"When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed."*** This is fascinating. I want us to think about this for a moment. Circumcision is strange for a couple of reasons, some of what we already talked about.

Here's the strange thing. They get into the land. They're ready to fight the battle. God says, "You're not going to fight the battle. First you're going to circumcise all of your men," which would be all of the people who were going to fight the war. It's like, "Okay."

Maybe you didn't think about this, but we're just told there... Again, I'm not trying to go into too much detail here, but circumcising a grown man is different than circumcising a child, and the time for healing and recovery is much longer, usually at least a week.

So, here's what happened. Why not circumcise them on the other side of the Jordan? The Jordan was a barrier and boundary. They were safe on the other side of the Jordan because it was a mile wide and the people from Jericho couldn't come over. Now they're on the other side of the Jordan.

Here's what's interesting. Jericho is up on a hill. Jericho can see the Jordan River and where they are. So, the first thing they do when they get into the new land is voluntarily disable themselves. Do you understand? They're going to be vulnerable. They can't fight for at least a week after they circumcise themselves.

What is the last thing you did in obeying God that made you look weak, foolish, and vulnerable? For some people, it's "I'm using one of my weeks of vacation to go on a short-term mission trip." That looks weak and foolish to the world. It's like, "Dude, you only get three weeks. Why wouldn't you use all three of those weeks to go on vacation?" Different value system.

How about you're in middle school, you're in high school, or you're in college? You're the person who's waiting until you're married, so you're not giving in to instant, cheap, immediate pleasure. You're not going to be part of the hookup, shack-up, breakup culture. It's what God says to do, but when you tell someone you're doing that, you look weak, prudish, and foolish.

This is such an important principle. God wants to build into your life things through obedience that make you have to trust him. That's what this was all about. This was all about, "I have to trust you, for seven or eight days while I heal, that you're going to protect me, because I can't protect myself." Here's what's interesting: God built into the church age, to the Christian life, two ways that he would forever make us have to trust him and make us vulnerable. It's the Lord's Day (the Sabbath) and the tithe.

Here's what the Lord's Day is saying, or taking the Sabbath, resting and treating one day unique and not working on that day. You're saying, "God, I believe you can do more in six days with me trusting you and depending on you than I could do trying to do everything I'm trying to do in seven days." I always think of Chick-fil-A. I always think when I drive by on a Sunday... I think a couple of things. "Man! It's closed" or "I'm hungry."

The other thing I always think is, "This is so nonstrategic from the world's perspective." You look foolish. It's like, "Sunday? It's *the* travel day for people. It's *the* day people are going back into town. You're going to close your store on one of the busiest days while, by the way, all of your competitors are still open?" Yeah. Different value system. We've seen how God has blessed Chick-fil-A. We love Christian chicken.

Then the tithe. Some of you just are not there with that. You have not taken that step. The tithe is "I'm going to trust that God can do more with 90 percent and trusting him than with 100 percent of me trying to do it all by myself." This is one of the reasons, if you are a believer, you can't live at the same lifestyle stage as the people who make the exact same amount of money as you. You have to live differently.

I don't live like everybody who makes as much money as I do, because I have a different value system. I give first to honor God. I save second to be wise. I live off the rest to teach myself contentment. So, God has built these things into the life of the church to make us trust. It looks like we're vulnerable, but it's for us to trust and depend on him.

## **02 WE NEED A BASE OF OPERATIONS (GILGAL)**

Then look at what happens here. So, they're in the new land. Verse 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.***" So, I told you you need a new perspective on your enemies. You need a procedure (that's a heart procedure). Now you need a *place*.

Gilgal is the most important place in the Old Testament that we don't often talk about. Gilgal is the beachhead, if you think in military terms, and that's really what they were. This was a military outfit. They're going, and the first thing they do is they find a beachhead in the Promised Land. They call it *Gilgal*.

*Gilgal* literally means rolling. It says here he rolled away the reproach of Egypt. What is reproach? *Reproach* is shame or disgrace. What's the reproach of Egypt about? That's about the sinful, shameful things they did in the past. God says, "I want you to name this place *Rolling*, because at Gilgal I'm going to remind you of the gospel."

You go, "Where did you roll it all to? Where did you roll all my reproach to?" When you get to the New Testament, you see that the place it was rolled to... Romans 15:3 says, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Christ." If you go, "Where does my sin, where does my shame go?" the answer is it went to Christ, and it went on the cross.

So, they called this place *Gilgal*. I want you to think about this place with me for a second. Here's what it was, and tell me if it sounds like anything you've ever heard of. This was the main place of communication and operations for the people of God in the Promised Land. It was the place where they got ready to fight their next battle. It was the place where, if they won a battle, they came back and celebrated together.

It was a place where, if they lost a battle, they came back and processed defeat together. It was a place where they practiced both circumcision and the Passover. It was a place where, when Saul was made to be the first king in Israel years later, they went back to Gilgal to crown him. It's the place where Elijah decides, when he's going to start a prophet school, the first residency in the Bible... He goes back to Gilgal.

Does Gilgal sound like anything? It's the local church. It's the local, visible church. What is Gilgal today? It's the local, visible church. Here's why this is important. Please hear this. The only reason the people of Israel could be successful in the Promised Land and fight the battles they needed to fight was because they had Gilgal. Israel could not be successful in the Promised Land without Gilgal. A Christian cannot be fruitful in the world without the local church.

Now, we live in a society today where everybody is very individualistic. I get it. That's kind of the American spirit. Everybody talks about their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I believe God saves people individually, and every person must come to Christ, but we don't often talk about the importance of the local church. You meet people in Winston-Salem (and anywhere), and they think the local church is optional, a great add-on if you have time, an extra.

I meet people like this in our city. I think they're genuinely born again, but they're not in a local church. If you meet people like this (I've met many of them), they all have one thing in common: They're weird. They're goofy. They're strange. That's actually what happens when you get out of community, by the way. You meet these people, and they're like the same person. They're like an archetype.

It's like, "I know exactly who you are. Let me guess. Dad doesn't want to be under authority. Dad can't get along with anybody." This is normally the story that happens. Then, let me guess. It's usually Dad again. Dad is overly idealistic about what the church should be. When you meet a Christian who's out of church, they're always idealistic about what the church should be.

It's the same as meeting a single guy who's like, "Yeah, I've got the perfect woman. She's super smart, she went to Harvard, and she's better looking than me." I'm like, "Dude, that girl would never date you, and she doesn't exist." That mythical woman you think you're going to marry who's going to meet all of your needs, or the mythical husband you think you're going to marry who's going to meet all of your needs...

All of us who are married are just laughing. That doesn't mean marriage isn't a good thing. It means marriage is even better than you think; it's just very different than you think. There's something special that happens when you join a local church. When you meet these people, as well, their lives are a complete mess, because they've taken their family, and they've taken their wife, and they've taken their kids out of church for decades.

Everyone is like, "Dad, why are you doing this? Why can't you just humble yourself? Why can't you just get along with people? Why do you have to be so critical of everything that happens all the time? Why do you have to be so religious? Why do you have to be so selfish?"

See, I think we need to recover... There are two things that need to be recovered in the Christian life: that it's gospel-centered and that it's church-shaped. We live in a society now in the church (thank God) where we've recovered gospel-centered church. Yes! It's about Christ. It's about the cross.

It's about repentance. It's about an empty tomb. It's about a bloody cross. It's about what Christ has done, not what I do. It's about I'm a sinner and I need grace. That's great. We forgot the second part. The Christian life is gospel-centered, but it's church-shaped. It's meant to be shaped by the local church.

By the way, this is the reason... Just a little behind the scenes for both of you who are interested in this. On our staff, we have a weekly meeting we call *air war*. We've been calling it that for years. It's basically a meeting about *this* gathering and how we get

this gathering ready to be the air war of our whole church so that everybody in our church can get ready to fight their next battle.

So, what do we do here? We preach the Word. We cast vision. We celebrate the sacraments. We sing and praise God together. We strengthen each other. We're sent out, and then we know we're coming back 52 times a year to celebrate victory and process defeat. This is what the local church is.

### **03 WE NEED TO REMEMBER PAST SALVATION**

Let me show you one other thing they do here at Gilgal. Look at verse 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."*** The first time they keep the Passover in the new land.

This is important, because they kept it in Exodus 12 during the tenth plague. They kept it when they left Mount Sinai. That's in Numbers 8 or 9. Now they're keeping it for the first time in the Promised Land, but there's something interesting with it. Look at verse 11.

***"And the day after the Passover..."*** Look. This is emphatic. ***"...on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 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."***

If you remember, while they were in the wilderness, for 40 years they had manna. Every day manna came. They had manna cakes and manna tacos and manna pizza and whatever. It was all manna. That's all they ate for 40 years. It was miraculous. We're told, as soon as they get into the Promised Land, God is done providing for them in that way.

God says, "I'm going to be your provider, but how I'm going to provide for you will change over your life." We all know that. When you were little, God provided through your parents. Now God provides through *you* working. It's actually a warning. This is so important.

If you read Numbers and Deuteronomy, God is almost completely positive about the new generation getting into the Promised Land. "You're going to get in there, and I'm going to give you victory." It's all positive except for one warning that keeps coming up and up and up. It's foreshadowed here. Here's what God says. Here's his main warning about the Promised Land: "When you can feed yourself, don't forget me."

When you have to get out every morning, and there's no manna unless God miraculously brings it, it's pretty easy to depend on God, because you have to. "God, I need you to do a miracle." When you can learn agriculture and learn how to feed yourself, many people forget God. Actually, the story of God's people has been they do what God says, they become prosperous, and then they forget about God.

This is why I genuinely believe, being a Christian for over 20 years now, the only way to fight against prosperity is generosity. The great lie is you'll start being generous later. My first job was at McDonald's. I was taught by my youth pastor, "If you get a dollar, you give a dime. If you get \$10, you give \$1. If you get \$100, you give \$10. If you get \$1,000, you give \$100. If you get \$10,000, you give \$1,000."

People keep thinking, "It's going to get easier to begin to be generous when I have more money." That's not true. So, they had to learn this principle. "I need to trust and depend on God and not forget him when I can feed myself."

#### **04 THE GOD WHO IS ON HIS OWN SIDE**

Finally, you need a *person to worship*. So, a new perspective, a procedure, a place, and a person to worship. Verse 13: "***When Joshua was by Jericho...***" We don't know what happened. Maybe he went on a prayer walk. He was already circumcised, so he didn't need to heal, so maybe while they were healing he goes up.

It says, "***...he lifted up his eyes and looked...***" This, by the way, is going to be his burning-bush moment. We all need a burning-bush moment in our lives. "***...and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand.***" Now, would you be a little scared if you woke up and there was some guy in your room with a drawn sword or you looked outside and there was a guy with a drawn sword?

Here's what we know. This is what's called a *theophany*. This is the preincarnate Christ appearing. There are 12 of these in the Old Testament. We know it's the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ, not just an angel, because one of the main rules with angels is don't worship them, and we'll see by the end of this chapter, Joshua worships the Angel of the Lord, and the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ, receives worship.

Here's the principle: before Jesus was born, he was alive. It hurts your head. When Jesus was born, a new person didn't need to come into existence. Jesus Christ needed to take on human flesh. So, he shows up in the Old Testament. Here he shows up as a warrior. Look at what happens here. "***And Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you for us, or for our adversaries?'***"

By the way, our questions reveal our hearts. All of my kids' questions are about snacks and screens. In fact, my daughter was like, "Hey, Dad, we should go on some more daddy/daughter dates this year." I'm like, "That's a great idea. Let's do it." She goes, "Where do you want to go for dessert on every daddy/daughter date?" I was like, "Do you want to go on a daddy/daughter date to hang out with me or to eat dessert?" She paused, and then she said, "Both."

Our questions reveal our hearts. Some of you, the only question you ever ask is financial. We just know it's coming. That's all you ever think. Everything is financial. "How much did that cost? How much is *that* going to cost? How much does he make? How did they afford that? What's the monthly payment? What would we need to pay them?" You're telling on yourself. The only thing you ever think about is finances.

Most people, the only thing they ever think about is themselves. It's like, we're sharing good news, we're sharing about something happening, and you're just thinking, "How is this going to affect me?" Our questions tell us a lot. He's asking this question: "God, whose side are you on?" God is going to go, "Wrong question. Wrong category."

Look at what God says. I love this. This is how you know the Bible was written by God and not by man. Think about it. If Israel is going to write this story down, they're going to say, "And Joshua goes to the Angel of the Lord, and the Angel of the Lord says, 'Joshua, I'm on your side. I'm on the side of Israel.'" Look at what he says instead.

Verse 14: "***And he...***" This is the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ. "***And he said, 'No...'***" Joshua is like, "I gave you multiple choice; you did 'fill in the blank.' I gave you two options; you gave me a third option." Look at what he says here. "***And he said, 'No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.'***"

He said, basically, "The question, Joshua (and all of us)..." The question is not, "God, are you on my side or are you on his side?" The question is, "God, how do I get on your side?" Jesus didn't come to take sides; he came to take charge. How many marriages... This could heal a marriage over time, because it's like, "Is God on my side or on my spouse's side?" Wrong question. Wrong category.

Both of you need to work very, very hard to make sure you're on God's side and doing what God has said. Go look over... Google this. Over the last 100 years, both the Republicans and the Democrats have tried to say God is on their side. Everybody would like to have God on their side. God says, "Actually, here's what I want you to do. I want you to find out what I'm doing and where I'm working, and I want you to join me there."



Here's what else is really interesting. Do you notice? The Angel of the Lord says to Joshua, "No." Can God tell you, "No"? I think it's a sign of a true believer. If you want to know, "How do I know if I really believe...?" For some of you, God only tells you, "Yes." It's really amazing how that works. God agrees with you on everything. Your life is perfect.

No matter what you want to do and who you want to date and what you want to look at and where you want to spend and how you want to treat your spouse... It's amazing. God just keeps telling you, "Yes." When you really realize the lordship of Christ is when you realize, "God can tell me no." I heard a lady say, "Whenever people ask me when I became a Christian, I really have two answers."

She said, "There's the answer of when I understood Jesus died for my sins and when I prayed to receive Christ and when I was baptized, but then there was the moment where I realized God could tell me no." She said, "That's the moment where I maybe really became a Christian. That's the moment I realized the lordship of Christ...not just that Jesus is my Savior but that Jesus is my Lord." Look at how this ends. Final thing. Verse 14 continued:

***"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped 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."***

What we see here is the principle that private visits with the Lord come before public victories. We see here with Joshua, as it ends, he has his burning bush moment, he takes off his shoes, and we're reminded that personal surrender happens before public success.

I just want to know... In a church like ours, where are the men and women who say, "I will meet with God like Joshua met with God"? It's interesting. In the Christian culture, I know everybody is doing their devotions, and I think it's great. In the new year, you started your devotional. You get up and read your Bible for a few minutes or maybe 30 minutes or whatever.

Everyone is really excited about Bible studies and *Through the Bible in a Year*, and I think that's great...reading the Bible in a year. Everyone talks about their quiet time. "When do you have your quiet time?" You know, open up your Bible and read your Bible a little bit.

Where are the men and women who meet with God, who say, "I went into my closet, and I closed my door, and I got on my face until, when I got up, the imprint of the

carpet was on my forehead. I interceded for my kids, and I got to the place..." The place of meeting with God is the place of surrender and submission.

"I said, 'God, I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do in my marriage.'" That's the place of power. "God, with my rebellious teenage daughter, I'm there. I'm ready to do whatever you want me to do. I'm there with my finances. I'm there with my career. I'm there with my sexuality. I'm there with alcohol. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Here's what's so powerful. Why did God appear to Joshua as a warrior? Let's think about it for a minute. There are two principles here: God will find you where you are, and he will reveal himself to you as you need him. Joshua needed to know somebody else was going to fight this battle with him. This is often what God will do.

In the Old Testament... Do you remember God sends out Abraham? Abraham is that great pilgrim. If you know that story, he says, "Leave your house, and leave your family, and go." Then early on in his journey (the first theophany in the Bible), God appears to Abraham. Do you know how God appears to Abraham? As a pilgrim. "I'm here with you, man. We're going to walk together."

Do you remember Jacob? He's wrestling. "I've wrecked my family. My brother hates me." How does God reveal himself to Jacob in that famous scene? As a wrestler. It's like, "All right, Jacob. Let's go, man. You need someone to wrestle with." How about Moses? Forty years of just boredom. God appears to him in a fire because his fire had burned out.

Why did Jesus Christ come as a savior? I mean, that has not been his identity. If you want to do some theology, the Trinity in eternity past... Jesus has not always been a savior. He became a savior because that's what you and I needed. He said, "All right. Someone has to live a perfect life. I will become that. Someone needs to be a substitute. I will become that. Someone needs to die for sinners. I will do that."

Let me just encourage you. Wherever you are, God will find you where you are, and he will come dressed in clothes, ready to help you where you are. Some of you go, "Man, I have a lot of big decisions to make in my life." Get on your face before God, and he will be to you a wonderful counselor.

Some of you go, "I have wrecked my whole life." God says, "That's great, because one of Jesus' names in the New Testament is a friend of sinners." Some of you say, "I just need some healing." Great. He will show up as your Good Shepherd. Some of you just have a horrible...

I was meeting with a guy this week. We were having lunch, and I found out he never knew his dad. It's heartbreaking. Dad leaves at 2, marries some other lady, has a whole family, and he has never had contact with him. It's like, "Well, thank you for the promise in the Bible that God will be a father to the fatherless."

Some of you need God to provide for you in a way. God says, "I would love to show up as your provider." So, if you'd close your eyes, let's pray. If you'll put your hands forward... Just extend them to receive from the Lord. Wherever you are, God wants to meet you where you are. The principle from Scripture is God meets you where you are, but he doesn't keep you where you are.

I don't know what you need. Some of you might say, "God, I am just so lonely. I need you to show up and be my friend. I need you to be the husband and bridegroom that you are to the church. I need to experience that. I need you to be the lover of my soul."

For some of you, it is counsel. You have decisions to make. Some of you just need authority. You say, "Lord, I just need you to show up as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Some of you are wrestling with something, and you say, "God, show up as the great wrestler and wrestle with me."

Lord, I pray for us, as a church, to ask you to meet us where we are and bring to us what we need. Lord, for some of us, we need to go under the heart surgery. The story of Joshua 5 is before we can use our sword, we have to go under the knife. It's the surgery of the heart. Lord, I pray you'd do it.

Lord, I pray, for others of us, that there would just be a value for the local church; as we see how important Gilgal was to the people of Israel, we would recommit and re-understand how important the local church is to the Christian life here. Lord, finally, I just pray you would make us men and women who really meet with you in submission and surrender. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.