

First Steps In The Promise Joshua 5:1-9

I. INTRODUCTION – RR Joshua 4:1-7

A. *Baby Steps*

1. One of a parent's greatest joys is when their child walks for the first time.
2. They've crawled for months, but finally they take those first wobbly steps.
3. It's a blast watching babies work up to it.
 - a. they crawl over to a piece of furniture & pull themselves upright.
 - b. then they turn, leaving just one hand clutching their prop, put one foot out & let go.
 - c. since they haven't learned the mechanics of walking,
 - d. they teeter in mid-stride then drop like a sack of potatoes on their rear.
4. Infants go through that same routine *dozens* of times till they learn how to balance & take another step.
5. As soon as they do, they get so excited they want to immediately break out in a sprint, which of course sends them sprawling head first on the ground.

B. *First Steps*

1. At several points in the NT, the Christian life is likened to a natural growth process.
2. When we first come to Christ we are *spiritual babes*.
3. But we don't *stay* infants;
 - a. our Heavenly Father desires that we would grow up,
 - b. emerging *from* infancy *into* adolescence and on into full-adulthood.
 - c. we find these phases of spiritual growth in 1 Cor. & 1 John.
4. At each place along this path of spiritual growth, there are *new lessons* to learn – *new steps* to take that carry us into a more mature experience of our relationship with God.
5. Our text today shows us *two crucial steps* the mature Christian must take.

C. Walking In The Promise

1. In our study on Wednesday nights we've seen how Israel's whole experience in the Exodus right up through their entrance into the Promised Land is meant to be ***a picture of our lives in Christ***.
2. In 1 Cor. 10, Paul says the Exodus is a ***type*** or ***example*** for us.
 - a. the Exodus from bondage through the blood of the Passover lamb is a picture of our deliverance from bondage to sin and death through the blood of the Lamb of God.
 - b. the Red Sea crossing is ***a picture of baptism*** which marks our transition from the kingdom of satan to the Kingdom of God.
 - c. the wilderness wandering, in which the entire generation of those who'd left Egypt died off, speaks of the fact that before we can enter into all the Lord has for us, we must die to the world & ***realize we are new creatures in Christ***.
 - d. then comes the crossing of the Jordan river, ***a second baptism which speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit*** which empowers us to enjoy the abundance of the Spirit-filled life.
3. That brings us to our text today - Joshua had the people of Israel do ***two things*** as they took their ***first steps*** in the place of the Promise.
5. Those two things have an important parallel to our walking in maturity before the Lord.

II. TEXT

A. First Step - The Memorial Pillar

1. As we read here in 4:1-7, when the people crossed through the Jordan River which God miraculously dried up for them to pass,
 2. They took 12 stones from the midst of the riverbed, & carried them to their first camping site in Canaan.
 3. There Joshua arranged them as a pillar, making a monument that would serve as a testimony for later generations of the power of God which dried up the river so they could cross.
 4. As we read on we find that besides the pillar they erected ***in their camp***, Joshua set up ***another*** pillar of 12 stones in the very midst of the Jordan, the top of which rose above the surface of the water.
 5. Each pillar pointed to the other, a reminder that God goes before & with His people, making a path for them when the way seems impossible.
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6. But what do those memorial pillars mean for us?
 7. Well, remember that the passage through the Jordan is a type of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which ushers us into the Spirit-empowered life.
 8. Just as those pillars were a memorial to the power of God which made their entrance into the promise possible,
 9. God has given us an *abiding memorial* to the fact that it is by *His* power & work, not *our* efforts, that we are saved.
 10. That memorial is *Communion*, the Lord's Table,
 - a. which reminds us of the sacrifice of our Savior.
 - b. we take a piece of broken bread, a symbol of His broken body,
 - c. and we drink a cup of the blood of grapes that reminds us of the blood He shed.
 11. Just as the pillar in the camp where Israel *stayed* pointed to the pillar in the midst of the river *they crossed* to enter the Blessing, so we hold the emblems of the Cross that stood on Calvary which opens the doorway to eternal life.
 12. But remember now, the Promised Land speaks of the Spirit-filled life; the pillar was in the place of Promise. Here's the lesson for us . . .
 13. Some people have the mistaken idea that when they're baptized in the Holy Spirit, they enter a place of spiritual enlightenment that moves *beyond* the fundamentals of the Faith.
 14. Not so! The Cross is the Heart & Soul of the Christian Life.
 15. In fact, it's the cross that *keeps* the spiritually mature person *humble*, because it reminds them all they have & are is the work of God, not themselves.
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16. I first came to Christ when I was 11 years old at Fullerton First Baptist Church.
 - a. but I didn't really *do* anything with my faith & ended up backsliding badly in my teen years.
 - b. at 20, burned out by sin, I re-committed my life to Christ & got involved in a heavily Charismatic church in Orange County.
 - c. what I observed there *confused* me.
 - 1) during the church services, there was an abundance of –
 - 2) tongues, interpretation, prophecy, words of knowledge & such,
 - 3) people being "slain in the Spirit" was a regular thing.

- 4) while *during* the services there was plenty evidence of the *gifts* of the Spirit, *before & after* service, there was little evidence of the *fruit* of the Spirit.
- 5) there was no *love* in the parking lot, no *gentleness* in finding a seat, no *kindness* to one another in the bookstore.
- d. what there was, was a huge amount of *arrogance* that they were so spiritual.
17. When I studied 1 Cor. for the first time, I realized that church I had attended was *just like* the Corinthian church.
- a. the Corinthians had the spiritual gifts going *full-bore*.
- b. Paul had to tell them to “turn it down” because they were getting *unbalanced* in their use of the gifts.
- c. but his letter begins with a stern rebuke – get this – for their horrendous *lack of spiritual maturity!*
18. How could a church that was so fluent in its use of the gifts be so shockingly immature?
19. We find the answer in Ch. 11 where Paul has to remind them on the *meaning of Communion*.
20. The Corinthians *had lost sight of the Cross*.
21. In their head-long pursuit of *spiritual power*, they’d forgotten the way to connect to it & had been seduced by a counterfeit.
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22. Christian, no matter how far you go with Christ, no matter how mature you may be – you will never outgrow the Cross.
23. There is no place of spiritual enlightenment, no ground of spiritual accomplishment, that isn’t founded on the Cross.
24. Listen to how the Apostle Paul expressed his own understanding of this in Philippians 3:10 & 11. This is that passage where he speaks of his passion to press on and enter into all God has for him . . .
- [O] that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**
25. Friend, the Spirit-filled life is entered & sustained through the Cross of Christ,
26. Through the continual reminder that who & what we are is not the work of our own efforts but the power of God.
27. 1 Cor. 1:18 –

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

- a. note that – the cross is the power of God, not who *were* saved, but who *are being* saved.
 - b. If you want or need God’s power to change you & make you more like Jesus, then *stay connect to the Cross*.
28. Now, I don’t mean wearing a piece of jewelry around your neck or a in on your lapel.
29. By “the Cross” I mean the love of God & work of Christ Who gave Himself for us.

30. That brings us to the second step Israel took in the Promised Land.

B. Second Step - Circumcision

^{5:1}So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

1. Rahab of Jericho told the 2 spies Joshua had sent out that all of the Canaanites were scared witless because Israel was camped on their border.
2. If the Canaanites had been *worried* before, now they’re just plain *freaked out!!*
3. The Jordan was an impassable barrier to a nation of 3 million people with all their children & supplies.
4. At the time of the crossing, it was the rainy season & the River was near flood stage.
5. Sure a couple of spies could swim across but not a whole nation.
6. The Canaanites figured they had several months *at least* before the Jordan lowered to the point where Israel would be able to get across in mass.
7. So, when word reached them that the waters of the Jordan had dried up & Israel had crossed over, they *lost* it.
8. This would be the perfect time for Israel to attack, right?
9. Right! And *that is precisely* why they can’t!

- a. Because if they do, then they'll be able to attribute their success to the panicked condition of their enemies.
- b. God wanted them to know their victory came from Him.

²At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." ³So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.

10. A hill is exactly what there would have been in a nation of 3 million!

11. While a flint can hold a pretty sharp edge, it's not the instrument you'd prefer for this *delicate* operation.

12. The men would be *incapacitated* for several days.

13. We have the story in Genesis 34 of a couple of Jacob's sons who killed *all* the men of a good sized city after *tricking* them into being circumcised.

14. The men were so out of it after the operation they couldn't defend themselves.

15. So this seems like a strange strategy for God to give Joshua if his task was to lead Israel in conquest of Canaan.

16. You don't want to *incapacitate* your army on the eve of battle.

17. So why did God tell Joshua to do this?

⁴And this *is* the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt *who were* males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. ⁶For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people *who were* men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD—to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey." ⁷Then Joshua circumcised their sons *whom* He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not

been circumcised on the way.

18. Circumcision was the unique mark God told Abraham & his descendants to take as the sign of His promise to them as a people.
19. The entire generation born in the wilderness had *not* been circumcised.
20. Now that they are *back* in the land God promised Abraham & his descendants, they must once again take the mark of the promise, identifying themselves by it.

⁸So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. ⁹Then the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

21. Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word for “roll.”
 22. Since this is the same place they set up the pillar of rocks, I guess we could call this the original *Rock & Roll camp*.
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23. What does the circumcision of Israel teach us about our life in the Spirit?
 24. To answer that we need to first ask why God called Abraham to take this unique mark as a covenant sign.
 - a. God called Abraham *out* of his homeland in Ur, out of the place of his ancestors, into a new land, a new family & identity.
 - b. in that new place of covenant with God, Abraham was being called to make a break with everything of his past that tied him to the world.
 - c. he was invited into a new way of living that was based on faith in God, rather than confidence in the flesh.
 - d. what better way to give evidence of that change from self to God than circumcision,
 - e. a cutting away of useless flesh, at the very organ that *creates* life.
 25. The sign of circumcision was meant to teach the Jews that as the covenant people of God they are to define their lives, not by the world, but by God.
 26. In Romans 2:28-29 Paul says –
²⁸ He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is [real] circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but

he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit . . .

27. To the Colossians he wrote in 2:11 –

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.

28. As a picture of our life in the Spirit, the circumcision at Gilgal represents the necessity that we come to a place *finally*, where we say, “I’m *done* with the *flesh!* I am so *over* the *world!*”

a. “No longer will I identify myself according to the things of my past.”

b. “I **AM** a new creature in Christ, and from now on, that is how I will live.”

29. Look at v. 9 again –

Then the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

30. Egypt was the place of Israel’s bondage. It’s representative for us of the world.

31. Before Israel could enter the Promise, all that was left of the past, all that remained of the days & marks of her bondage, had to be cut away.

32. Far too many Christians try to live with one foot in the world & another in the Kingdom of God.

a. They wonder why they find no joy or victory in their spiritual life,

b. While at the same time feeling guilty in their pursuit of the flesh.

c. They have too much of God to be happy in the world, but too much of the world to be joyous in the Spirit.

33. We will only make progress in the Spirit when we’ve come to our own Gilgal & said, finally – “That’s it! I’m done with the flesh! From now on, all that matters is Christ.”

34. Here’s how Paul says it in Philipians in 3:3 –

We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Move On

1. The Spirit is calling us to move on, to press in to all the Lord has for us.
2. Maturity is the destiny He has planned for every one of us.
3. The Spirit-filled life isn't just for some elite sect of the super-spiritual.
4. The Spirit-filled life ***IS*** the abundant life Jesus said He came to give **ALL** who believe in Him. [John 10]
5. Today we've seen the first 2 steps in the Spirit-filled life, demonstrated in the story of Israel's entrance into Canaan.
 - a. 1st - We must stay connected to the Cross of Christ, for it is the power of God that empowers us. Communion points to the Cross, just as the pillar in Gilgal pointed to the pillar in the Jordan.
 - b. 2nd – If we would live in the Spirit, then we must pass through our own spiritual Gilgal, where what ties us to the past is cut away, fully & finally.