

Jos208 – Cut Away The Flesh For Victory – Joshua 5:1-10

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Cut Away The Flesh For Victory.” We’re in Joshua Chapter 5 verses 1-10.

The flesh – in the sense that we are using it today- is used to refer to the old nature of sin and self-focus and self-sufficiency in a *Christ follower*. And so cutting away the flesh is describing the radical removal, the casting away, the crucifying of the old sin nature which enables us to actually *walk* in the Promised Life of victory that has been given to us (positionally) *in Jesus Christ*.

Does that make sense? Because that is what we are going to be talking about this message.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, we need you today. It’s not just me. Every single one of us in this room needs you. We need a touch from you. We need your strength. We need your clarity. Our hearts need to open and our minds need to be sharp that we would be able to hear your Word come alive to us, Lord. We need your Word to come alive to us. And so we make ourselves vulnerable. We open ourselves up to you, Lord, and say, do the work. You are the Great Physician. Bring it, Lord. Show us where we absolutely must cut away the flesh for victory in the Promised Life. Do it now we pray, for your sake, Jesus, and in your name, amen.*

Last message we saw the Israelites build Memorials For The Marathon. God *knew* they needed to remember the *miracle of Jordan* to keep them pushing ahead from victory to victory in the Promised Land.

But today, God still isn’t ready for them to fight their first battle at the walls of Jericho. Today, like last week, God has another lesson that is critical for us to learn in order for us to begin living victoriously in the Promised Life.

But – we might say – this lesson cuts a little deeper than last week.

Joshua 5:1 (NLT)

I When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings who lived along the Mediterranean coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan River so the people of Israel could cross, they lost heart and were paralyzed with fear because of them.

Terror had gripped the enemy. As they watched a million or so of God's people flood into the land crossing the dry river bed of the Jordan, God's awesome and miraculous power had caused panic in the enemy.

And miracles are an awesome witness – both to the people around you and maybe even more so to our spiritual enemy.

What a strategic moment, what a great time to begin the battle to take the Promised Land. Momentum is in Israel's favor. God's people are pumped and ready to go and the enemy is paralyzed with fear. What else would God choose to do at this critical moment? Obviously he would want to keep the momentum going and send the enemy fleeing – right???

Actually – no – wrong.

Instead of capitalizing on this momentum God chooses to delay the battle and he chooses to (instead) work on the hearts of Israel before he gives them even one minor victory.

Because God wants us to “*be*” before he wants us to “*do*.” God wants *you* more than he wants your effort. We must first be willing to become *who God wants us to be* and then we will be able to *do what God wants us to do*. And we'll be able to do it “in the spirit” instead of “in the flesh.”

God requires these “Preparations for the battle” for our good and for his glory because we cannot go into God's battle in your own strength or in our own flesh. We cannot expect a spiritual victory if we are fighting our battles *in the flesh*.

Today God's going to teach Israel a critical and difficult lesson to show them how to truly live in the Promised Life.

But wait a minute, aren't they already *in* the Promised Life? Yes. They have just arrived in the Promised Life. They are in their new life *positionally* but are they ready to conquer the enemy *practically*?

Tell me this, can we be saved *positionally* but in a *practical* sense be being beaten up and taken out by the enemy?

If you've chosen to follow Jesus as Lord, then positionally you have the victory of the Promised Life. But you may not be experiencing much of that Promised Life because you may not realize how God has required you to fight the battles.

The Book of Joshua is all about *how* do we actually live in the Promised Life that's been given us in Christ. And we are about to see a *critical requirement*, what we might even call a "pre-requisite" to prepare us to actually walk in the victory that God has for us *in the Promised Life*.

So the people had followed Joshua and the Ark (picture of Christ) across the Jordan River *into* the Promised Land. They had built memorials and the enemy was paralyzed with fear. And then the Lord does something that makes absolutely no sense in the physical – or you might say – "in the flesh."

Joshua 5:2–3 (NLT)

2 At that time the Lord told Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise this second generation of Israelites."

3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the entire male population of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.

In Genesis 17 God makes a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. And God makes this covenant to always *be with* the descendants of Abraham and to give the Promised Land to Abraham's descendants as their "forever possession," and the mark (sign) of the covenant was the circumcision of all males in each generation to come. It was to be a *physical sign* of the *spiritual covenant* that God made with his people. But it also became the picture of a *profound truth* about how the Promised Life is to be "*possessed*."

If we say "MORTIFY the flesh" we don't mean *extreme embarrassment* (as in I was mortified.) The original definition of *mortify* was "*to destroy the strength, vitality, or functioning of a thing . . .*"

That is what we mean by *mortifying* (cutting away) the old nature of sin and self-reliance (the flesh.) And so circumcision is actually a picture of the *spiritual destruction* of our flesh (our sin nature) so that we are made to depend on God's grace and God's strength alone.

But – (hear this) – *true* circumcision (in both the Old Testament and the New Testament) is actually the *circumcision of the heart*.

Colossians 2:11 (NLT)

11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.

Romans 2:29 (NLT)

29 No, a true Jew (member of God’s people) is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit . . .

Even in the Old Testament the *physical* circumcision was to be a sign of the *inward* circumcision of the heart.

Deuteronomy 10:16 (NIV)

16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

Deuteronomy 30:6 (NIV)

6 The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

Circumcision is a PICTURE of the *cutting away* – the putting off – the mortifying – of the *old flesh nature* of sin and self-reliance.

But... if circumcision was the sign of the covenant that Israel would inherit the Promised Land then why were these Israelites *not circumcised*?

Joshua 5:4–5 (NLT)

4 Joshua had to circumcise them because all the men who were old enough to fight in battle when they left Egypt had died in the wilderness.

5 Those who left Egypt had all been circumcised, but none of those born after the Exodus, during the years in the wilderness, had been circumcised.

Why weren’t they circumcised? Because they were wandering around in the wilderness of disobedience for 40 years.

Joshua 5:6 (NLT)

6 The Israelites had traveled in the wilderness for forty years until all the men who were old enough to fight in battle when they left Egypt had died. For they had disobeyed the Lord (thru their unbelief), and the Lord vowed he would not let them enter the land he had sworn to give us—a land flowing with milk and honey.

So this new generation of Israelites had been brought into the edge of the Promised Life *without cutting away the flesh for victory*, and that had to change before they could take one step further into the Promised Life.

And please listen carefully. If you have made Jesus Christ your Lord today, then you have been brought into the “Promised Life” positionally through your faith in Jesus

Christ. But now each of us must come with humility and submit to the Great Physician of our souls and the old sin nature (the flesh) of our hearts must begin to be cut away – it must be *cut out* of our lives.

So what exactly does that mean? Turn to Romans Chapter 6 and we'll quickly talk through it. Romans Chapter 6 is about our position in Christ. And it starts by saying that because of our faith in Jesus Christ we have been *so* identified with Christ that positionally we have been given the Promised Life – in Christ.

Our position in Christ is all given to us freely *by God's grace and through our faith alone*. However, if we want to experience the Promised Life that we've been given in Christ then *we* have a *very definite role*.

And it starts in Romans 6:11.

Romans 6:11 (NLT)

11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Since you are dead to the power of sin, (positionally) then you must *act like it*. You must consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin, in other words, *cut away the flesh* and stop acting like it has power over you – because (positionally) it *does not*.

Then the very next verse, Romans 6:12 says,

Romans 6:12 (NLT)

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires.

Jesus has given us the victory. We have to learn to live in it.

Then the next verse, Romans 6:13,

Romans 6:13 (NLT)

13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life* the promised life). *So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.

This is *THE HOW* – right here.

The more you give yourself completely to God, the less you will serve sin and the less you will be used as an instrument of evil. The more you give yourself completely to God,

then the more you will *hate sin*. And the more you hate sin, then the more you will desire to *cut away the sin* in your life.

And *that* is the circumcision of the heart.

And if we try to live the Promised Life in Christ without first learning to cut away the flesh, we have only *guaranteed failure* to look forward to.

So the circumcision of the heart is the cutting away of the old flesh life and it is the continual putting off of our own strength and our own will. It is the most vital step to you beginning to live the Promised Life in Jesus Christ. And that is why God has all of Israel go through this event right now, before they fight *one* battle in the Promised Life.

But please remember only Christ in you is strong enough to wage the war required to cut away your old flesh life and your sin nature will never be completely eradicated until the day we put on immortality.

But today if you will circumcise your heart, surrendering your own strength and pride, then the mighty power of Jesus Christ in you will *overcome* the poser of your flesh rendering it inoperative and *then* you can begin to fight the battles necessary in order to live the Promised Life.

Continuing back in Joshua 5:7.

Joshua 5:7 (NLT)

7 So Joshua circumcised their sons—those who had grown up to take their fathers' places—for they had not been circumcised on the way to the Promised Land.

There's one more thing here – important to hear. Circumcision of the heart cannot take place in the *wilderness of disobedience*. You must first cross over to the new life *by faith* and *then* begin cutting away the flesh in order to win the battles of the Promised Life.

Another great lesson in Joshua 5:8.

Joshua 5:8 (NLT)

8 After all the males had been circumcised, they rested in the camp until they were healed.

Right in plain sight of all their enemies God had them mortify their own strength so they were left helpless (without any of their own strength) in plain sight of their enemies. In man's eyes they were vulnerable but God was teaching them the secret to true spiritual strength.

Remove our *own* strength
Remove our *self-reliance*
in order to cling to God alone for supernatural victory.

That is what God was teaching the Israelites and *that* is what God desires to teach us today.

Joshua 5:9 (NLT)

9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the shame of your slavery in Egypt.” So that place has been called Gilgal to this day. (Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word that means “to roll away”)

When we step out of the wilderness of disobedience and begin to cut away the old flesh life, God will respond by rolling away the shame of our slavery to sin. God waited forty years for Israel to choose to do this. How long has he been waiting for us to do the same thing?

Now verse 10 tells us one of the greatest results of this “circumcision of the heart.”

Joshua 5:10 (NLT)

10 While the Israelites were camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they celebrated Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month.

The Passover celebration had been on hold for forty years by God’s command. Israel had forfeited the celebration of their salvation from Egypt by living in disobedience and unbelief. But immediately after the cutting away of the flesh of their self-will and self-reliance God gave them back the celebration of the joy of their salvation.

King David Prayed the Exact Same thing in Psalm 51

***Create in me a clean heart, O God,
Renew a right spirit within me.
And Restore to me the joy of Your salvation . . .***

So today, if you find yourself far from God, if your spiritual life is on hold... you might need to ask yourself have you forfeited walking with God in the Promised Life in exchange for a life of wandering in the Wilderness. If so, cross over into the Promised Life and begin *cutting away the flesh for victory*.

As long as we are holding onto our own flesh – our own strength – or our own will, we will at some level be keeping ourselves from the Promised Life God has for us. We need a circumcision of the heart. We need to cut away the flesh in our lives allowing our

weaknesses to be overcome by his strength and our flesh to be crucified by his Spirit, and then we will be able to celebrate our salvation even on the edge of our next battle.

Guys, this cutting away of the flesh and the celebration of Passover both occurred right under the enemy's nose.

As **Psalm 23:5** says; *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; . . .*

Are you in the *thick of the fight* today?

Are you in a place that is truly dangerous and where you are truly vulnerable? The Lord is wanting to prepare you for battle by cutting away the flesh-life of your heart.

Are you holding on to something of your own flesh? Something of your own self? And thereby forfeiting the power and the victory of the Promised Life in Jesus Christ?

The Lord would say to you today, **Circumcise your heart** – **Cut away the flesh** in order to prepare for victorious battle and entering into the joy of your salvation – even in the presence of your enemy.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, the simple truths are the most powerful.*

Right now, I just want to give you a chance to respond, right in your own heart, right where you're at. What has the Lord been talking about to you? What has the Holy Spirit been bringing up in your heart and in your mind? What have you felt that knot in your stomach about? What have you tried to defend in your mind, to justify, to rationalize, to deny? Man, do business with God. Just say,

Lord, I see the Promised Life on the other side. I will go there. I will step there. I will cross the Jordan from the wilderness of disobedience and I'll stand in your presence. I'll choose to cut away the flesh in my life. That thing (go ahead and name it) that thing. That thing right there, Lord. I need you. I need your power to do it. I'll make the choice, but yours is the power. I choose to turn my back on the wilderness of disobedience and sin and to stand in the Promised Life with you and see you conquer the enemy, and raise me up and restore my life, and reconcile my relationships and put things back in order. By your power – I am powerless. All I have is my choice and I make it for you today, Jesus, I make it for you. Be glorified in my life. In your name Jesus, amen.