

Joshua 5:10–15 Sermon Discussion Guide

Passage Summary

Israel has finally entered the Promised Land. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God has brought His people across the Jordan on dry ground and fulfilled the promise He made generations earlier. They celebrate the Passover, eat from the produce of the land, and the manna that had sustained them in the wilderness comes to an end. A new chapter is beginning.

But before Joshua leads Israel into battle at Jericho, he has a surprising encounter. Joshua sees a man standing before him with a drawn sword and asks the question we might expect a military leader to ask: “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” The answer is startling: “No.” He identifies himself instead as the commander of the army of the Lord. Joshua wants to know whose side God is on. But God refuses Joshua’s categories. The more important question is not whether God is on Joshua’s side, but whether Joshua is on God’s.

Joshua immediately falls on his face in worship and asks, “What does my lord say to his servant?” The commander tells him to remove his sandals because the ground on which he stands is holy. The scene intentionally recalls Moses before the burning bush. Once again, a servant of God stands on holy ground before the holy God.

This encounter reminds Israel (and us) that God cannot be recruited into our agendas. He is not simply the defender of the people, causes, preferences, or positions we have already decided are right. He is holy. He establishes what is good, true, and righteous, and we are called to submit ourselves to Him. That holiness exposes us. When we encounter the perfection of God, we begin to see the depth of our own sin and our divided hearts. Yet the holiness of God is not something Christians should merely fear or avoid. It is something we are called to desire: “Be holy, for I am holy.” We were created to know God, reflect His character, and increasingly become like Him.

Yet none of us does this perfectly. Our hope therefore cannot rest in the completeness of our obedience. The gospel points us to the One who was perfectly obedient in our place. Jesus fulfilled the law we could not fulfill, and at the cross He bore the judgment our sin deserved. The sword of judgment falls upon Christ so that sinners can be forgiven, clothed in His righteousness, and reconciled to the Father. Grace, then, does not make holiness unnecessary. Grace makes the pursuit of holiness possible. Because our standing with God rests in Christ’s perfect record rather than our own, we are free to repent when we fail, believe the gospel again, and pursue the holy God who has graciously made us His own.

Reflection Questions

Holy Ground Once More

1. When you think about what draws you to God, what comes to mind first: His love, comfort, peace, grace, provision, holiness, or something else?
 - Why might God's holiness be something we think about less often?
 - What would it mean to actually *yearn* for His holiness?
2. Joshua's encounter reminds us that God's holiness is not simply about avoiding certain behaviors. Jesus shows us that holiness reaches all the way into our desires, motives, loves, and thoughts.
 - Where are you most tempted to settle for outward obedience while ignoring what is happening in your heart?
3. The golf illustration shifts the emphasis from "Look how terrible I am" to "Look how extraordinarily good the other person is."
 - How might focusing primarily on the beauty and perfection of God change the way you think about your own sin?
 - Is your view of holiness more focused on your failures or on God's goodness?
4. God says, "Be holy, for I am holy."
 - Is there an area of your life where you have become comfortable with something that does not reflect God's character?
 - What might pursuing holiness look like there?

A Servant's Posture

5. Joshua asks, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" The answer is simply, "No."
 - Where are you most tempted to assume that God must be on "your side"?
 - How might this show up in politics, relationships, parenting, work, theological disagreements, or cultural issues?
6. We can easily imagine that God loves everything we love and hates everything we hate.
 - How can we tell when we are submitting ourselves to God versus remaking God in our own image?
7. Think about a conflict you are currently experiencing.
 - Have you spent more time asking God to prove that you are right, or asking Him to show you where you need to repent, change, or submit?
8. Joshua responds, "What does my lord say to his servant?"
 - What would change if this became the basic posture of your Christian life?
9. Falling on his face acknowledges that Joshua is not ultimately in command. That God's holiness is worthy of complete worship!
 - Where is surrender particularly difficult for you right now?
 - What are you afraid might happen if you truly relinquish control to God?

A Commander Who Comes in Grace

10. God's holiness exposes our inability to obey Him with perfectly undivided hearts. Yet Christ has perfectly obeyed on our behalf.

- When you fail, do you tend to run toward Christ in repentance or away from Him in shame?
- What does the gospel invite you to do instead?

11. Our righteousness before God rests on Christ's perfect record rather than ours.

- How does that truth keep the pursuit of holiness from becoming an exhausting attempt to prove ourselves?
- How does grace actually give us greater freedom to confront our sin honestly?

12. Because Christ has already secured our acceptance, Christians can pursue holiness without fear of being cast away every time they fail.

- Where is God currently inviting you to **repent, believe, and obey**?

Closing Prayer Points

1. Worship God for His Holiness

- Praise God not only for what He gives us, but simply for who He is.
- Thank Him for His perfect goodness, purity, justice, beauty, and righteousness.
- Ask Him to deepen your desire to know Him and become more like Him.

2. Ask God to Expose Our Hearts

- Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal places where outward obedience hides inward sin.
- Confess areas where you have become comfortable with attitudes or desires that do not reflect God's holiness.
- Ask for repentance that reaches beyond behavior into the loves of your heart.

3. Surrender Our “Sides” to God

- Confess the ways you have assumed that God must agree with your opinions, preferences, or agendas.
- Bring specific conflicts before Him and ask, “Lord, what would you say to your servant?”
- Pray for humility to submit to God's Word even when it confronts something you deeply want to believe.

4. Rest in the Righteousness of Christ

- Thank Jesus for the perfect obedience you could never accomplish.
- Praise Him for bearing the judgment your sin deserved.
- Ask for confidence that your acceptance before God rests completely in Christ rather than your performance.

5. Pursue Holiness Through Grace

- Ask God to show you one area where He is calling you toward greater holiness.
- Pray for strength to obey without believing that your obedience earns His love.

- When you fail, ask for grace to quickly repent, believe the gospel again, and continue walking with Christ.

6. Live With a Servant's Posture

- Pray for an undivided heart that desires God's will above your own.
- Ask God to make the posture of Joshua increasingly your own: "What does my Lord say to his servant?"
- Pray that your life would reflect the holiness and grace of the King to whom you belong.