

## Rolling Away Reproach – Joshua 5:1-12

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Union Baptist Church – 8/13/2017

### I. INTRODUCTION

What comes to your mind when you hear the word, “reproach.” It’s not a word we use every day, but it’s one you’ll need to be familiar with as we study Scripture together today. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word as “a cause or occasion of blame, discredit, or disgrace.” Used in a sentence, someone might say, “His conduct has brought shame and reproach to his family.” In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the word translated, “reproach,” is *cherpah*, and it speaks of that idea of disgrace...a disgrace that would become an opportunity for taunting and mocking by others. “The [reproached would receive] abuse by the words spoken against them and by the rumors which were spread about them” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*).

In your life, have you ever experienced a season where you were subjected to reproach or disgrace because of poor choices you made? Sometimes we can be susceptible to reproach for reasons beyond our control or through just being associated with a person or an organization that’s behaving badly or through all appearances seems to be. However, if we’re honest with ourselves, we can all think of times in our lives when we made our own poor choices and at least deserved reproach, even if no one other than God and perhaps Satan ever found out about it. So as you think about those seasons in your own life of disgrace and reproach, did you experience any taunting and mocking or emotional punishment, either from Satan or from other people who knew about your poor choices? I’ll pretty much guarantee that you did, because one thing is for sure: Satan loves to taunt and mock us for any failures in our lives and he’ll do everything he can to keep us from finding our way out of reproach and disgrace. He loves to keep us paralyzed and demoralized and stuck in the reproach of poor choices we’ve made.

Well today, we’re going to learn how God rolled away the reproach of some people who were stuck there; and, in this case, they were stuck there not because of their own choices but because of the poor choices of their parents. Their

parents, sadly, remained in that state of reproach because of their stubbornness and refusal to listen to God and follow his way out. But for the children who learned from their parent's mistakes, things turned out much differently. If you have any reproach you'd like to get rid of today, pay attention and you'll discover God's way out. Today's message is called, "Rolling Away Reproach." Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Joshua, chapter 5, where we'll be studying verses 1 through 12 today.

By way of context, the nation of Israel has just crossed the Jordan River on dry land through the miraculous work of God and is now camped at a place they would soon name, Gilgal, meaning "wheel" or "to roll;" a name that would remind future generations of what God was about to do with the reproach they had been subject to for 40 years. In this place they would call, Gilgal, they had also just erected a 12-stone memorial, made with stones taken from the middle of the Jordan River, to remind future generations of God's miraculous parting of the Jordan River. And this is where we pick up our account today.

## **II. THE REALITY OF THE ONE TRUE GOD AND HIS AWESOME POWER CAUSES HEARTS TO MELT AND SPIRITS TO DEFLATE (v. 1)**

Let's begin by reading verse 1 of Joshua chapter 5:

***1 Now it came about when all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard how the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel.***

What we find out as we begin our study today, is that word was traveling fast about the Israelites' miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. ALL the kings of the Amorites and ALL the kings of the Canaanites had heard what had happened. This means there must have been a lot of eyewitnesses besides the Israelites themselves who had seen with their own eyes what the Lord had done. And the interesting thing is that they ALL attributed the miracle to the Lord, not to a great engineering feat of the Israelites or a magic trick performed by their religious leaders. The kings and people living in the Promised Land knew without a doubt

that the Lord, the one true God, had parted the waters so the Israelites could cross into the land.

We also know from our previous study of Rahab and the spies that all people had also heard about God's miracle 40 years earlier in parting the Red Sea and about the recent defeat of the Amorites living east of the Jordan. These facts about unmistakable miracles the one true God had performed on behalf of the Israelites were causing a severe panic attack within the land so that both the commoners and the kings were shaking in fear. In fact, they believed so strongly in the reality of the one true God and his awesome power that their hearts were described as melting and their spirits as deflating!

And yet, in spite of this full and profound belief that God exists and was coming their way, still the kings and the people of the land chose to fight against him rather than surrendering to him and figuring out how they could get on his side...much like most people in the world today...ignoring the unmistakable evidence all around us of God's existence and his simple offer of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and choosing instead to continue down the dead-end path of trying to fight against him and pretend he doesn't exist. And the end result of choosing to fight against God instead of aligning with him will be revealed quite graphically in the future chapters of Joshua. It's not a place any of us should choose to be.

### **III. THE LORD COMMANDS JOSHUA TO CIRCUMCISE THE SONS OF ISRAEL AND JOSHUA CARRIES IT OUT (vs. 2-8)**

So we have a good idea now of how the people in the land felt about the arrival of the Israelites and the evidence of God's work through them. Let's read now, in verses 2 through 8, how God continued to prepare his people to enter and conquer the Promised Land. Beginning in verse 2:

***2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make for yourself flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time." 3 So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. 4 This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness along the way after they came out of Egypt. 5 For all the***

***people who came out were circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised. 6 For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7 Their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way. 8 Now when they had finished circumcising all the nation, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.***

As we've seen multiple times now in our study of Joshua, the Lord and Joshua are in very close communication and the Lord regularly speaks directly to Joshua and tells him exactly what to do next. Just after Joshua had followed the Lord's instructions to set-up the 12-stone memorial, the Lord spoke again and told him to do two things: 1) make knives out of flint; and 2) circumcise the sons of Israel. And how does Joshua respond?...Like a very godly person: He gets right to it; making flint knives and starting the large and unimaginably unpleasant job of circumcising hundreds of thousands of grown men. So the next time you feel like complaining about something God asks you to do, remember that it's probably not nearly as bad as this. And it's probably not nearly as painful and humiliating as what God asked all the men of Israel to undergo with no numbing medication!

Fortunately Joshua must have had help performing the circumcisions, because in verse 8 we're told that "THEY" finished circumcising the whole nation. And this was evidently a memorable experience in a lot of ways, as you can imagine, because the area where these hundreds of thousands of mostly adult circumcisions were performed was given a name to commemorate the event. It was called Gibeath-haaraloth, meaning "hill of foreskins." I'm sure all the men who passed near that area in the future would cringe and get queasy in their stomachs at the thought of what had happened there. Sorry the message isn't quite "G" rated today folks! The Bible deals with all things doesn't it?...the good, the bad, the ugly, the unmentionable... everything addressed and exposed to the light by our all-knowing God!

Well, the reason why God asked Joshua to perform these circumcisions is given for us in verses 4 through 7. And what we find out is that the Israelites living as slaves in Egypt were still abiding by at least some of the terms of the covenant God had made with their father Abraham, a covenant that promised a multitude of descendants to Abraham who would one day possess the land of Canaan. And this covenant was entered into by the sign of circumcision. This is laid out for us in Genesis chapter 17, verses 9-14:

***9 God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. 13 "A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."***

Circumcision was the required sign for taking part in God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. And even while in slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were evidently still following the terms of this covenant by circumcising their sons on the eighth day after their birth. We know this because in our Joshua passage, we read that all the men of war who came out of Egypt were already circumcised at the time of the Exodus.

This sign of circumcision was also a requirement of the Mosaic Covenant when God gave the Law at Mount Horeb after rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt. In Leviticus 12, verses 2 to 3, we read the circumcision instructions under the new Mosaic Covenant:

***2 'When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. 3 'On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.***

So what we can conclude is that the problem must have arisen after the Israelites rebelled against God at Kadesh Barnea and refused to follow him into the Promised Land. This passage in Joshua shows us that during the subsequent 40 years of wandering in the wilderness under the discipline of the Lord, the parents continued in their rebellion and stubbornness against God by refusing to operate under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant by circumcising their sons on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. This is why Joshua now had to circumcise all the boys (most of whom were now men) who had been born during the 40 years of wilderness wandering.

You see, the rebellious fathers who had refused to enter the Promised Land and then had refused to circumcise their sons, had unfortunately remained in their reproach and disgrace during the 40 years of wandering and sadly even died in that state. They perished in the wilderness because they had refused to listen to the voice of the Lord at Kadesh Barnea and had continued to refuse in the wilderness. And as a result the Lord had kept them from ever seeing the Promised Land.

I can't help but wonder if things might have been different had they truly repented of their rebellion and mistrust of God at Kadesh Barnea and done what was necessary to get right with God and get back in step with the terms of his covenant. Knowing what we know about God's mercy and his willingness to forgive and restore those who truly acknowledge and turn away from their sin and get back in step with God's purposes, I can't help but believe that things might have turned out much differently...and at a minimum they could have gotten right with God and not have had to end their lives stuck in their disgrace and reproach and continued rebellion. But sadly, that's not the road they chose and all the men aged 20 and older at the time of the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea, experienced God's judgment and perished in the wilderness in a continued state of rebellion against him. By not listening to, trusting and obeying the voice of the Lord and then refusing to repent of their failures, they missed out on the blessings of the Promised Land and ended up dying in their sin.

Well, during the 40 years of wilderness wandering God was preparing a new generation who would put behind the rebellious ways of their parents. They had had 40 years to learn from the stubbornness and rebellion of their fathers and were now ready to listen to God and follow him. And the first item of business was to get them back in line with the terms of God's covenant by receiving the physical sign of circumcision.

#### IV. UNDERSTANDING THE DEEPER SIGNIFICANCE OF CIRCUMCISION

So what is the real significance of circumcision and why has God used it as the sign for covenant relationship with him? Of course, physical circumcision is no longer required for entry into the new covenant under Christ, but spiritual circumcision still is. So what is the spiritual reality that physical circumcision points to? As we survey what the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament teach about circumcision, we quickly find out that physical circumcision pointed to the deeper spiritual reality of heart circumcision. Let me just share a few verses with you to show you how this is true and help you understand what circumcision of the heart is all about:

Let's start with a portion of the speech Moses gave to the Israelites at the end of the 40 years in the wilderness. Listen carefully and pay attention to what he says about circumcision. I'm reading from Deuteronomy 10, verses 14 to 16:

***14 Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. 15 Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. 16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (ESV)***

Did you notice what Moses said about circumcision? He said: "***Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn***"...And Moses goes on a few verses later to say: INSTEAD of being stubborn...Fear the Lord, serve him and hold fast to him. So this is what circumcision is really about, a giving up of stubborn self-will, replacing it with complete surrender to the Lord and his purposes...a soft heart that clings to him, trusts him, honors him and is willing follow him wherever he leads.

Is that what your heart looks like today? Is this an accurate description of how you interact with God on a daily basis? Well, that's what circumcision of the heart looks like, and is the exact opposite of what the rebellious fathers had been doing during the 40 years of wandering. Listen to how Moses, a couple of chapters later in Deuteronomy, described how the rebellious fathers had been living during those 40 years in the wilderness. This is from Deuteronomy 12, verses 8 to 9:

***8 "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; 9 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you.***

Moses described what had been happening during the 40 years in the wilderness as stubbornness and every man doing what was right in his own eyes. It's no wonder they had stopped circumcising their sons as the Lord had commanded them. That choice spoke profoundly of the spiritual state of their hearts before God: a stubborn self-will that followed a sinful heart's desires rather than the wisdom of the loving Creator of the universe. And did you notice what else Moses said? In living with that uncircumcised heart before God they had not arrived at the rest and the inheritance God wanted to give them. Stubborn self-will that insists on your way and puts your wisdom and desires above God's will never get you there!

Let's look at one more passage from Deuteronomy that speaks of heart circumcision and its significance. This one comes near the end of Moses' speech as he was preparing to pass the leadership to Joshua. It's found in Deuteronomy 30, verses 5 and 6. Moses says:

***5 "The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.***

These verses tell us that true and complete heart circumcision is done by the Lord and is necessary if we're really going to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul, and if we really want to enter into abundant and eternal life with him. If we want to live with and love our God, we need circumcised hearts.



We're going to talk a little more about this in a few minutes when we wrap up today. But to sum up the significance of physical circumcision and the spiritual reality it points to, I would say this: *Circumcision signifies removal of our rebellious, sinful, stubborn self-will and replacing it with a humble, soft heart; open to the Lord and ready to listen, trust and obey him.*

And for the new generation of sons God had raised up in the wilderness to replace the rebellious, stubborn fathers, following God's command to undergo the humiliating, painful process of adult circumcision and get back in line with the terms of his covenant, showed that they were ready to listen, trust and obey the Lord as he prepared to lead them to finally take possession of the Promised Land and find the rest and the inheritance that had eluded their fathers. And after the circumcisions were complete and the hill of foreskins was piled high, the 3-day healing process was ready to begin.

#### **V. THROUGH CIRCUMCISION, THE REPROACH OF EGYPT IS ROLLED AWAY BY THE LORD (v.9)**

But as Joshua and his helpers completed circumcising all the sons of Israel, the Lord spoke again to Joshua and listen to what he said in verse 9:

***9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.***

God did the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt and he did it through circumcision, as his people returned in humble obedience to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant; showing soft hearts ready to listen, trust and obey him. And what was the reproach of Egypt? Certainly there was the fact that they had been slaves there and that Egypt and the other nations still saw that as their identity: a slave nation. But I think it may have more to do with the fact that though God had dramatically rescued them from slavery in Egypt 40 years earlier, they had since that time been simply wandering around aimlessly in the wilderness. All their big ideas and boasts of taking the land of Canaan as their own possession had fallen flat during those 40 years and made them subject to the ridicule of Egypt and other nations around them. That's what the reproach that comes from an uncircumcised heart will do to you!

But as God's people finally humbled themselves in repentance and got back in line with his purposes and commands, God rolled away the reproach. He took away the shame, the defeat, the slavery to selfish-will and prepared them for a grand display of what the living God can do through people who are willing to listen to, trust and obey him. Like the other rolling aways God would do in the future...the rolling away of the stone from Jesus' grave, taking away the reproach that Satan and others were heaping on him as they thought they had defeated him... and the rolling away of the spiritual grave stones and the reproach of all those who will repent of sin and trust in the living Jesus...Like these awesome rolling aways of reproach God would do in the future, God rolled away the reproach of those rebellious years in the wilderness and he did it through circumcision.

And to commemorate and remind future generations of this rolling away of reproach, the Israelites named the place Gilgal, that name meaning "wheel" or "to roll." When their children would ask why this place was named Gilgal, they would be able to tell them how God had rolled away their reproach as they humbled themselves before God in repentance and got back in line with his purposes and commands through circumcision.

## **VI. THE PASSOVER IS OBSERVED AND THE PRODUCE OF THE PROMISED LAND IS ENJOYED (vs. 10-12)**

So let's read our final verses for today and see what God brought about as his people got back in step with his purposes and commands and were then reminded through Passover of the blood sacrifice that was necessary to cover their sins and allow them to be in relationship with a holy God...a blood sacrifice that would one day be offered once for all by our Savior Jesus Christ on the cross. Let's read verses 10 through 12:

***10 While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.***

Notice again how God timed all these events perfectly so that his people would be ready on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nissan to complete their return to the terms of his covenant with them by celebrating the Passover on the exact day he had commanded it to be celebrated each year. And notice how, as they fully returned to the Lord and got in step with his purposes and commands, they began to enjoy the blessings of restored relationship and obedience: 40 years of one item on the menu came to an end and they were finally able to enjoy some of the fruit of the land flowing with milk and honey. Despite their stubbornness and rebellion, God was faithful and had continued to provide them with food and water in the wilderness and even made it so their shoes didn't wear out. But now, back in full obedience and submission, they caught a glimpse of how much better life is when lived in healthy relationship with and submission to God and his purposes. Enjoying the fruits of the Promised Land, they were finally ready for conquest by God's power and to enter into the rest God would provide!

## **VII. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

So what is God speaking to you through what we've studied today? What did he draw your attention to? What stood out in your mind as we walked through this passage? Do you have any reproach or disgrace or mistakes in your life right now that you'd like God to roll away forever? There could be some of you here today who need to do spiritually what the Israelites did physically on that day at Gilgal. You need God to circumcise your heart for the first time...to replace your heart of stubbornness and sin and rebellion against God, with a soft new-created heart that longs to know God and please him...to allow you to experience the forever forgiveness of your sin that can only come through what the perfect Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, did on the cross...dying there to take the wrath of God you deserved for your sin and pay the penalty for it once and for all, so that you don't have to. What a gift he offers to every person in the world who is willing to simply repent of sin, believe in Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, and invite him to be their Savior and the Ruler of their life. Repent, believe and receive him as Savior and Lord. That's how you can receive a circumcised heart from God right now and allow him to roll away your reproach and prepare you to live life and eternity with him. Repenting is simply owning and admitting sin and desiring to leave it behind and go in a different direction.

Let me share with you 2 verses from the New Testament that tell us what circumcision is about for us today under the new covenant through Jesus Christ. From Galatians 6, verse 15:

***For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.***

Physical circumcision was simply meant to point to the circumcision of our hearts, which God performs today through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, whereby he forgives our sin and gives us a new, soft heart that wants to please God and is able to listen to, trust and follow Him. What's important today is that we have that newly created heart that God gives to each person who repents and trusts in Christ.

And listen to the words found in Philippians 3, verses 3 and 9:

***3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,... not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ,***

Those who have circumcised hearts aren't people who have it all together and have somehow earned their way into God's favor. Instead the true circumcision are those who put no confidence in their own wisdom or their own efforts or their own goodness, but instead simply come in humility and repentance to God through Jesus Christ... Repenting, believing in him and receiving him...And in so doing they receive that newly circumcised heart from God and the righteousness and peace with God that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Is there anyone who is ready to do that here today? Is there anyone who's tired of living in the reproach and disgrace of sin and a life out of relationship with God? Is there anyone who wants God to right now, once and for all, roll away your reproach, forgive your sin, and restore you to a peaceful and power-filled relationship with your Creator? It's such a simple process to allow God to circumcise your heart today! Don't put it off any longer. Don't spend any more years wandering in the wilderness with a stubborn heart. I have several people ready to talk to you right now and lead you in a simple prayer to God that if you

mean in your heart will roll away your reproach, give you a soft heart to God, make you his child forever, and start you on the journey of living life and eternity with him. You are invited to come talk to them now or anytime before you leave today. Just don't put it off any longer or feel embarrassed to do it. All of us would be overjoyed to see anyone take that life changing step!

But for most of you here that already have circumcised hearts through repentance and faith in Christ, I would ask: Are you living and relating to God with the new, soft heart he's given to you? Are you putting stubbornness and self-will behind you or are you still allowing it to run your life? How are you doing today at listening to, trusting and obeying the voice of the Lord? Are you seeking him in his Word and listening carefully to what he has to say? Are you willing to trust what he says and act on it? Are you quick to admit and repent of your sins and mistakes when they crop up? This is the path to healthy relationship with the Lord and the blessings that only come through trust and obedience. I would challenge you today to assess where you're at on the stubborn, self-focused and hard-hearted scale today. And if you find challenges there, start with repentance. And then start thinking about and seeking God for ways he can help you cultivate and grow the soft heart he's given you.

Circumcision is how God rolled away the reproach of Egypt from the sons of Israel. The miracle at the Jordan River showed how great and awesome God is, but the full reproach of Egypt could not be removed until the Israelites fully surrendered themselves to this great God by coming back into full obedience to his covenant and following its terms. Physical circumcision represents humble submission to God and his purposes and was a visible sign of a person's alignment with him. Think of how humbling and strange the practice of circumcision is. To be circumcised was humiliating and painful, but represented a willingness to follow God's commandments even when they're difficult, strange and out of step with what we think makes sense.

Yet as we've seen today, physical circumcision pointed to a much deeper and more important spiritual truth: circumcision of the heart; putting aside stubbornness, obstinancy, pride, and a hard heart and replacing it with humility, trust, obedience and a soft heart to God and his Word. Circumcision represents the removal of our flesh, our old man, our desire to be on the throne and run our own lives. Circumcision of the heart represents that transformation God brings

when we come to repentance and faith in Christ...giving us a new, soft heart that puts no confidence in the flesh and human wisdom, but instead operates in humble faith in God, reliance on him, and submission to his purposes.

So as we close today, let's remember in how we walk and the way we relate to God and his Word, those profound words from Moses: "***Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.***" Instead, let our lives constantly reflect soft hearts that are clinging to God, continually seeking him, and ready to listen to, trust and obey whatever he tells us to do.