



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Joshua 5:1-15

Lesson 5

Fall 2020

"Consecration for Conquest"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Good to see all of you here. We are in the Book of Joshua. We have recently begun a series in it. We're in chapter 5 this morning, and we're going to look at the entire chapter. I'll read it all in just a moment. But to give you a little background you'll remember, if you've been coming, that Israel has come into the land. The Lord brought them into Canaan in a miraculous way. He divided the Jordan River, backed it up, and they crossed over on dry land into the promised land. And so they are there as we come to chapter 5. This miraculous entrance into the land has occurred; and it affected those who are dwelling in the land, the Canaanites. We begin the chapter with that.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make for yourself flint knives, and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time." <sup>3</sup> So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. *(So just as a moment of explanation, as verse 2 ends, that they were to circumcise the sons of Israel the second time, that probably means because the generation previously left Egypt circumcised, and the nation that entered in, this new generation was not circumcised. This is the second time the nation will be circumcised. Verse 6).* <sup>6</sup> For the sons of Israel walked 40 years in the wilderness, until 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. <sup>7</sup> The children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way.

<sup>8</sup> Now when they had finished circumcising all the nation, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched *grain*. <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Now it came about, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" <sup>14</sup> He said, "No; rather I indeed come now *as* captain of the host of the LORD." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to

his servant?" <sup>15</sup>The captain of the LORD's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Joshua 5:1-15

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, there's a sense in which this ground in which we are this morning is holy. We come together as Your people and we learn in the early chapters in the Book of Revelation that Your Son, the Lord Jesus, walks among the lampstands. And Lord, we are one of those, and we can assume He's here with us. —This is a holy place in that sense. And this is a special time in the week for us to fellowship with You, to learn from You, to be taught by the Holy Spirit as we look into Your Word, Your inerrant Word. And we pray, Lord, that You would bless us as we do that.

This is a passage we recognize of ancient literature; ancient history recording events that actually occurred; miraculous events; events that took place within a particular people. —The people of Israel; Your chosen people. —And yet a passage with lessons for us every bit as relevant today as they were then. And so, Lord, teach us the things we need to know to live the life that is pleasing to You and one that brings glory and honor to You, and one that's healthy for us and makes us genuine warriors of Christ in the midst of a very dark age in which we live—a very difficult time in our nation's history.

As some have said, "We're looking into an abyss." Maybe so. May we be lights in the midst of it. Equip us for that. Whatever goes on in this age, it's temporal. It doesn't last. We're looking forward to the day that will come when Your Son returns and the kingdom is established—that's the hope that we have. And it's a certain hope. Just as Israel had the hope of entering Canaan, entering the promised land, the land of milk and honey and You brought them in—You will bring Your people into that great future land, that kingdom to come. And we look forward to that. Help us to keep our eyes on that.

And may our time of study give us an interest, a holy zeal, to live as Your warriors in the midst of this age—warriors in the sense that we give the Gospel; we live the life of it before this world. May we do that. May we be equipped for that as we study together this morning—as we study together and worship together. So bless us Lord. Build us up in the faith.

We pray for ourselves spiritually, and we pray for ourselves materially. We pray for those who are healing from sickness. We pray for our nation. Bless it. Protect it from this pandemic. But also Lord, bless us as we come to a time of great decision in the weeks to come. Bless the nation with wisdom. Bless Your people with wisdom. And we pray that Your will be done. And we know that it will be, regardless. We know that it will be, and we rest in that.

Lord, we thank You for this time together. Bless us now as we continue in worship. And bless us, Lord, as we study together, we pray. We look to You to bless. We look to the Spirit to lead and guide us in our thinking. We commit the time to You in Christ's name. Amen.

There is an ancient Latin adage that translates, "If you want peace prepare for war." But how does a nation do that? Well the suggestion of the saying is the best way to insure peace is to be well armed and ready for conflict. But what does a nation do when it's not well armed and war comes? Winston Churchill used rhetoric. When he became prime minister, England was not prepared to fight Hitler. So he spoke to the House of Commons honestly and inspirationally. He said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat." And it worked. It electrified Parliament and the nation.

Joshua prepared Israel in a different way from all of these. He prepared the nation spiritually. Told the people to consecrate themselves for conquest. And that's the lesson for us as well. Christians live in a spiritual war daily, continually. Sometimes it may seem to let up, but it never really does. We need to be armed with the Word of God. Scripture is our sword, but we won't use it well if we're not dedicated to Christ. If we are to conquer, we must be, first of all, consecrated. We must set ourselves apart

daily for that task, just as Israel did when they entered the land of Canaan. So we learn a lot from this passage.

The land had already been prepared by the Lord for conquest. Chapter 5 begins with that in the first verse, with a description of the effect that the miraculous crossing of the Jordan had on the kings of Canaan. They knew a miracle had occurred, and probably thought of Egypt's demise when the Lord parted the Red Sea. And so we're told, "their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer". (vs1). They had no will to fight. Yet they also would not remedy their situation by repenting and believing in the Lord, as Rahab had done.

It's a witness to the hardness of the human heart. Even when the Lord has given clear light and when man has a clear light of revelation, he does not yield. He digs in his heels even more and resists. It's natural that he do that. That is the response of the natural man, the unregenerate heart. And that's the picture we have here. The kings of Canaan were in mortal dread of the Lord and His power. They knew from the facts and history that they were doomed. Still they didn't repent and seek mercy. Ignorance was no excuse. They had the same revelation that Rahab had. She turned to the Lord as did, it seems, her family.

And the Lord was patient with them, that He was patient with the Amorites and the Canaanites. After telling Abraham that Israel would inherit the land, He waited until the fourth generation. That's what He told Abraham He was going to do, some 500 years. And yet they only increased in their sinfulness. But now His patience had run out, and in righteousness with justice, He would judge the people of the land and give Canaan to His people. It was time for the conquest.

But verses 2 and 3 indicate that Israel was not yet ready for the conquest. And so, just when we might expect the order to be given to go forward and conquer, the Lord says, in effect, "wait". "At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make for yourself flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time." So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth." (vs2-3).

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. It signified membership in that covenant, and in the nation of the covenant. Without it there was no participation in national blessings, no participation in the promises of the covenant. In fact, in Genesis 17, verse 14, when the Lord gave this rite to Abraham, He said to him that anyone who is not circumcised "...shall be cut off from His people." Very serious.

So it's surprising to find that the nation had entered the land uncircumcised. But as verses 4 and 5 explain, during the 40 years of wilderness wandering, the practice of circumcision had not been carried out. Now the reason isn't revealed, but according to verse 6, it was in connection with the judgment of God on the nation, because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord.

It's the sin at Kadesh-barnea that is referred to there, when the people refused to enter the land because of a bad report by 10 of the 12 spies. They, you remember, feared the giants and they didn't believe the Lord's promise. They didn't believe that He could overcome those obstacles of huge city walls and giants and all these frightful things that they saw—that He wasn't sufficient for that and wouldn't keep His Word. So the consequence: They wandered until that unfaithful generation died off. And, it's thought, that since that generation was under judgment, it could not apply the sign of the covenant to its sons. And so because of judgment the practice of circumcision was suspended.

When the fathers all died the judgment was lifted. But the new generation needed the sign before it could conquer the land. So God commanded Joshua to make knives of flint and circumcise the men. Now that was risky, and unconventional. The smart strategy, what one would expect, would be following this miraculous entrance into the land and the terror that had come upon the Canaanites and the Amorites, was strike immediately. Strike while the iron is hot. That's conventional wisdom.

But this decision, this procedure, left the nation defenseless. Circumcision is surgery—and incapacitating. Genesis 34 illustrates that with the slaughter of the men of Shechem by Levi and Simian after those men in the city had been circumcised. I won't go into the story. You can read it. But the two brothers used circumcision as a ruse to

make the men of Shechem vulnerable to their vengeance. Well now, God had commanded Joshua to make his people vulnerable; make His people incapable of fighting or defending themselves for a number of days.

And He had delayed the battle, all for the sake of circumcision—which might seem very odd—it would have to the Canaanites. But God doesn't do things the way we do them. He's not in a hurry like we are in a hurry. We need to learn that. We need to learn that because to enjoy His blessings, we must move at His pace according to His leading, according to His will. And that may involve waiting. It's a hard thing for people to do—to wait upon the Lord. We want to act immediately; but we need to wait. We need to wait on Providence.

And before we can enjoy His blessing we must be right with Him. There must be obedience to God. There must be consecration to Him. That is not just Old Testament theology and ethics, that's New Testament as well. In fact Jesus said, in John 14, in verse 15, "If you love Me you will keep My commandments." And that's what this is about, showing love, obedience, devotion to the Lord by keeping His commandments.

And it was urgent that they do that. There's a strange incident in Exodus 4 that illustrates the urgency. Moses was going back to Egypt from Midian to begin this great ministry that he would have as the lawgiver and as the one who would lead them out of slavery when the Lord almost put him to death. Almost slew Moses. And what saved him was his wife Zipporah, who took a flint and circumcised Moses' son, then scolded Moses. She called him a bridegroom of blood. Well, it shows the importance of circumcision under the old covenant. Moses had failed to do that. Moses had failed to perform that very basic, that very important rite, on his son and he almost died as a consequence.

So before this people could possess the land, they had to be obedient to God's Word, and carry out the sign of the covenant by being circumcised. They had to consecrate themselves. Consecration is about dedication. And circumcision signified that. It showed they belong to God. But cutting away the flesh, they showed they were separated from the flesh and the world, spiritually. It's an outward sign, but a sign that

has an inward reality—inner separation. The inner purification that is necessary for a life of obedience and love to God.

Now that's the meaning of it. Circumcision, in and of itself, means nothing. It does nothing. It's a sign, and it reminded them of what they are and what they were to be. So its main meaning was spiritual. And I think that's clear from the law itself, because in Deuteronomy, chapter 10, in verse 16, Moses said to the people, "Circumcise your heart and stiffen your neck no longer." That's the meaning of this physical rite. What it's saying, in other words, and what Moses is saying, and what that rite of circumcision indicates is, they were to live inwardly according to the outward sign. We're to do the same.

In Colossians, chapter 2, verse 11 Paul wrote that we, as Christians, have been circumcised in Christ. He wrote, "...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, " (*it's a spiritual thing*), "...in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." And what that is referring to is the cross and what Christ accomplished at the cross. Christ bought us, at the cross, through the shedding of His blood, the rending of His flesh, bought us out of the world. We are separated from our old life and separated to Christ. And at that moment of faith, that becomes real. That reality is applied to us. What was bought for us at the cross 2000 years ago is applied to us today at the moment of faith. And it becomes real to us. We actually become, spiritually, new creatures—a new creation.

So we're to live as a new creation. We're to live that way. As Paul said in Romans, chapter 6, verse 11, "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin..." (*cut off from the flesh as it were*), "...but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Realize it is so, and live it. And Paul goes on to say, in verse 13, "...do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments..." (*so, that can be translated 'weapons'*), "...of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead and your members as instruments..." (*or weapons*), "...of righteousness to God." That's consecration. And that is pictured here. It's preparation for war.

After this they remained in camp to heal and named the place Gilgal—meaning *rolling*; because in verse 9 the Lord said, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Now this expression, "the reproach of Egypt", has been explained in various ways, though there's not a lot of certainty on what it means or what it refers to. But one of the most common explanations is, it refers to the slander that came out of Egypt while Israel was under discipline in the desert. When the Egyptians learned that the Israelites were wandering around in the wilderness, they concluded that God had abandoned them and began slandering them because of it. But with this national circumcision, that slander had been silenced. They were in the land and consecrated to God in a right relationship with Him. That may be the meaning.

Some have suggested it's something else. It's having come into the land, and now officially been brought into the Abrahamic covenant, they are no longer slaves, they are now freemen, and the slander of slavery has been removed. Either way, they are in a new relationship, and the world's slander has been silenced.

But circumcision was not all that was necessary. They also had to celebrate the Passover. That, too, was commanded of them. It was the date on the calendar for that feast, and so we read in verse 10, "While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho."

This was the third celebration of the Passover recorded in the Bible. The first was in Egypt before their deliverance, the day before they were to leave. And then the second was at Mt. Sinai, referred to in Numbers, chapter 9. Now it's not clear that the nation observed the Passover while wandering in the wilderness. There's no other record of it other than Numbers, chapter 9. And it would seem from the condition we know of the nation, not having circumcised their sons, that perhaps they weren't observing the Passover during all that time, which would tell us how much of a spiritual desert Israel was in while wandering in that physical desert for 40 years. But here the people celebrated.

The timing was significant. The first Passover happened just before they left Egypt, just before they came out of slavery. And this Passover was celebrated just after they entered the land, just after the wilderness wanderings had now ended and they are before their great inheritance. And as the people ate and remembered the Lord and how He brought them out of slavery with a mighty hand, it would confirm His promise to bring them in and give them possession of all that they saw before them by that same mighty hand. He's faithful. And that would be the reminder to them. He keeps His Word always.

So, the nation camped on the plains of Jericho. In physical weakness they celebrated the Passover, but they celebrated it in safety, because the Lord was with them and was keeping their enemies away—keeping them in fear and inactive.

Well that's the assurance that we have, as we trust in Him and obey His Word. It again, was an odd command to give. It was an odd thing to occur. We would expect: Cross the Jordan; go to Jericho and fight and conquer. But now they're incapacitated. But that's the obedience that they were giving to the Lord. And as we do that, as we live in obedience against what may seem to be common sense, but it's what the Word of God teaches us to do in a particular situation, we can know this, that He will provide for us as we are obedient. He provides protection and everything we need. And we see that here.

As they ate the Passover before the city of Jericho, it was something like Psalm 23:5, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Those are more than just beautiful words and sentiment. —They mean something. —They are true. They, and other promises like them are assurances of God's help when we walk with Him. He's always faithful. —Always faithful.

The encouragement to trust Him was also reinforced in the next event. While He fed them the Passover, He stopped feeding them the manna that they had eaten for 40 years. Verse 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*. 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."

The point is—Israel had arrived. The wilderness wanderings had ended and this marked a new beginning for the nation. God's special providence that was necessary to bring them into the promised land ended when the promise was fulfilled. It was no longer necessary. And the fact that they ate some of the produce of the land in their Passover meal and after, was again proof of God's faithfulness and the reliability of His promises. It was a clear symbol that they had taken possession of the land.

Go back into Moses' instruction, which he gave before they entered the land, after the 40 years of wandering, and he says in one of his sermons in Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 11, that God promised to give them a rich land, with "houses filled with all (*kinds*) of good things" that they didn't provide. So He's giving them a land that they didn't cultivate; giving them houses they didn't build; giving them many things. And he lists the good things that the Lord would give to them, or the Lord lists them: 'Wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant'. And now here Israel is eating from a harvest that they didn't plant.

All through the Bible we are instructed to walk by faith—Old Testament and New Testament alike. We are taught to walk by faith, as those great saints did in the Old Testament. To live by trusting the Lord day by day, knowing that He will provide and bless, and will do that because He is sovereign over all of the earth and He is faithful to His promises, and faithful to His people, faithful to supply us. It's the instruction of Zachariah, chapter 4, verse 6. I love this verse. It's so New Testament in its theology, but it's biblical in its theology, "This is the Word of the LORD, 'Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts."

Old Testament and New Testament alike, that's how the Christian lives. Not by power. Not by the might of armies that Israel would conquer, but by the power of the Lord. And it's how we overcome, as well.

What we need to do is be faithful and follow Him. He will prepare our way, fight our battles, and give us victory. That's the assurance that's given in the next verses,

verses 13 through 15. Consecration to God is necessary for blessing. But we also need to be led into those blessings by the Lord Himself and submit to His leading. And Joshua now meets his captain he was to follow.

He had not been given any direct instruction on how to conquer and capture Jericho. And so, being a general he went out to survey the city and develop a strategy. He must have been a little puzzled, as he looked at the walls of Jericho as one of those cities that were large and fortified to heaven. (As those spies reported 38 years earlier; 'We can't conquer this. They have massive walls and giants that live there.')

Well its walls did seem invincible. And the only weapons the Israelites had were swords and slings and arrows and spears—and arrows and spears just bounce off walls. And so Joshua was pondering a strategy that would be successful. Success was necessary, because Jericho was the gateway to Canaan. To enter the land they had to go through Jericho.

While he was thinking about the battle, he was surprised to look up and see a soldier standing there with his sword drawn. Not knowing who the man was, whether he was friend or foe, Joshua went to him, ready to fight if necessary, and asked, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" Literally it is, "Are you ours or our foes?" And the answer Joshua was given made it clear that He was no human warrior. "No;" He said, "...rather I indeed come now *as* captain of the host of the LORD."

The answer "No", is a bit cryptic—mysterious. But it was a way of correcting the question that was asked. It's never a question of whether God is on our side. God is sovereign. The question is, 'Are we on God's side?' His sovereignty is indicated in the word, "*host*".

We get an idea of what "the host of the Lord" is from various passages in the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 22, where Micaiah the prophet told King Ahab of his vision, he revealed that he saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him. That's the army of the Lord—The host of heaven, myriads and myriads of angelic beings. Millions and millions of these powerful angels. Or 2 Kings, chapter 6, verse 16 and 17, when Elijah and his servant were in Dothan, surrounded by the Syrian

army. And unseen to them was the Lord's host surrounding them. The mountain was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

Here, suddenly Joshua's eyes were opened. He knew the stranger was no man, and fell on his face to the earth and bowed down and said to Him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" It's not clear that Joshua realized he was seeing a theophany ... clearly he knew he was seeing something supernatural—but not altogether clear that at this moment, he understood it was an appearance of God; specifically the pre-incarnate Christ, because he calls Him 'Adonay', 'Lord', not Yahweh, Jehovah.

But it's clear he was seeing a theophany, from what follows. Verse 15, 'a captain of the Lord of hosts said to Joshua', "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. That is almost word for word, the command that the Lord gave Moses when He appeared to him in the burning bush, in Exodus, chapter 3, in verse 5. Angels don't call for worship. When men fall down before angels, they tell them to, 'Get up! Don't worship me.'

This One received the worship, because this was the Lord Jesus Christ. And He came with sword drawn to indicate that it was time for battle. And that He had come with His heavenly army to make war on the Canaanites and give the land to Israel. Just as the Lord had encouraged Moses with the words, "I will be with you," He would do the same for Joshua. That indicates the nature of the conflict. It would be physical, with swords and spears—but also spiritual. And chiefly spiritual. It would be a war fought on two levels. And the Lord would insure Israel's victory. He would be in the vanguard of every battle leading the Lord's army, His host, in an invisible war against the material armies of Canaan. He would always be there, unseen, but real.

And it's the same for us. Paul reminds us of that in Ephesians, chapter 6 (vs12), that "...our struggle is not against flesh and blood". Paul wasn't suggesting that there is no materialism in our struggle in this world. There is, of course. History proves that. Early Christians were covered in pitch and made into torches to light Nero's garden. And Christians across the Roman empire were thrown to the lions. And it's not just ancient history. Christians are suffering across the globe. Right now there's a bloody persecution

of Christians by Muslims in Nigeria, (though it's hardly reported on). So it is physical, it is material. But the greater battle, the one that energizes the one that we see around us is spiritual and unseen. —Just as it was with Job, when he was physically and emotionally and spiritually afflicted by Satan.

Well that's what Paul means when he says that our war is 'against the rulers, the powers, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.' We fight, really, on three fronts. We fight against three enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. And often it's difficult to tell them apart which shows how deceptive and how pervasive this spiritual conflict is. It is within us and it is around us. And no one is sufficient for it—not in and of ourselves—to withstand the enemy.

Paul gives us a sense of the strength of the enemy and the difficulty of withstanding this struggle in various passages—in Galatians, chapter 5, in verse 17, and in Romans, chapter 7, in verse 15. Our war is between the flesh and the spirit. It's between the flesh and the human spirit, (that's in Romans 7), and between the flesh and the Holy Spirit in the Book of Galatians. It's an inner struggle in which Paul found himself doing the very thing that he didn't want to do—doing the very thing that he hated. And it reminds us, from the apostle's experience, and I think we know it from our own experience, that while we are new creatures, we are a new creation, we are still subject to temptation and sin.

We began with the question, "How does a nation prepare for war?" The church is in a more deadly struggle than any national or global 'hot war'. How do we prepare for it? The Book of Hebrews gives direction. In chapter 12:1, the author tells us, "...lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and run with endurance the race set before us..." But there's a specific way to run, to live each moment, and that is, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." And that word 'author' can mean 'leader' or 'captain'.

Follow the captain. Do not take your eyes off of Him. Do not take your eyes off the leader, or you will get out of your lane and you will trip, you will fall. So keep your eyes on Him. That's essentially the instruction the Lord gave to Joshua here. "Lay aside

every encumbrance and sin" by consecrating yourselves to the Lord and His life and His service. Put aside whatever interferes with that.

At the same time, we're to fill our minds with Christ; who He is and what He's done. In fact, I think, as we do that, we do lay aside these things. We do, naturally, put them away as we see the beauty of Christ and the glory of Christ and we contemplate who He is and what He's done as the eternal Son of God become man and our Savior. As we fill our minds with that revelation, with the Scriptures, we do lay aside these things. We want to.

It's through the Scriptures that we learn of Him. It's through the Scriptures that we grow in our relationship with Him, as well as through prayer and study. These are the vital tools of faith. These are the vital things that we need to be giving our attention to. Satan is always trying to destroy the Church. He'll use whatever means is most effective. He may use physical means, as he has down through history and as he is using, as I said. And maybe someday soon that will be the case with us. We'll face physical harm, physical persecution.

But often, in the west, it's not the physical persecution that we face. Christians are faced with something else, and that is distractions. I think that's one of Satan's chief tools to get us 'off the mark', as it were, off the Scriptures, off of Christ, of taking our eyes off Him and putting them on other things.

C. S. Lewis gave a good illustration of that in his *Screwtape Letters*. He wrote that during the 2nd World War. It was published in 1942, and in the early chapters of *The Screwtape Letters*, the master demon, Screwtape, tells his understudy, Wormwood, how to undermine the spiritual life of the Christian that he had been assigned to. In one chapter he told him to; 'keep him from praying'. In another it was, to distract him. —Make him either an extreme patriot or an extreme pacifist. It didn't matter which one. All extremes except devotion to the enemy are to be encouraged. In other words, distract him with some urgent issue to keep him away from the essential issue—Christ Himself.

Look, politics is important, and we need to vote. It's a God given right that we have. It's a privilege. We need to do that. But never become distracted by politics. The Lord is in control, and we need to always keep our eyes focused on Him.

I got a message last night from our friend in the north, in Oklahoma, Mr. Black. And he evidently got this from someone as well. It's nicely printed out. But the message is, "During the next 28 days," and now it's, what? 16 days, "please don't let the elephants and the donkeys make you forget you belong to—the Lamb." That's a good point. That's who we belong to, and that's who we're to keep our eyes focused upon. We're to keep our eyes on Christ; He is our captain. That's how the author describes Him in Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 10, and then again in Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 2. The 'author' of our salvation, or the 'captain' of our salvation. He is our captain because He won the victory for His people at the cross, where He purchased us for Himself, and for eternal life, and defeated the devil.

Satan's already defeated. Believers are assured of ultimate victory. So we are to follow our captain as He leads us through this world on our march to heaven, fighting along the way, not yielding to distractions and temptations. We're assured of ultimate victory. We never should despair. We are assured of victory, just as Israel was assured that they would enter the land, and they did.

In May 1940, when Churchill gave his speech to the House of Commons and said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat," he was asking for their support of him and his government. The German army was the greatest army in the world. It was unstoppable. But the nation put its hope in Churchill, even though there was no reason to believe that England could hold out against the Third Reich.

How much more should we put our confidence in our captain? Consecrate ourselves to Him, lay aside the encumbrances, not get distracted from the Scriptures, and follow Christ daily. That's the way we overcome the enemy. That's the way we grow.

But first we must be circumcised, spiritually, with the circumcision of the heart, being cut off from the old life, and set apart to God. It's what Christ did at the cross for

all who believe in Him, when He suffered death and judgment for us. So believe in Him if you have not. Trust in Christ if you have not done that. Be made new, and then live that new life. Dedicate yourself to the Savior and consecrate yourself to conquest—to a life of service. That's the good life, and that's the life of eternal reward. God help us all to do that.

Let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to bless this Supper that we are about to take. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for the example we have in this text of Israel and Your faithfulness to them, 'of the rite that they went through', and the Passover that they celebrated all speaks to us of the spiritual reality that we have entered into through faith in Christ. And Lord, may we be dedicated to You, to our great Triune God, and serve You faithfully. May we understand that we are in a conflict constantly. These are serious times. It's always for the Christian, a serious time. And help us to take it that way, and dedicate ourselves to You.

We pray Your blessing upon us now, as we take the Lord's Supper. May it be what it is intended to be, a reminder to us of all that we have in Christ, what He has done for us at such great cost, and who we now are because of Him through faith and faith alone. We thank You for Him. We thank you for Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

*(End of Audio)*