

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2021
SERMON: BEING RIGHT WITH GOD – RENEWAL!
TEXT: JOSHUA 5:1-15

In May 2013, thirteen-year-old Arvind Mahankali correctly spelled the word "knaidel" (a German-Yiddish word for a dumpling) to win the 86th Scripps National Spelling Bee. Mahankali had finished third each of the two previous years. In both of those years he was eliminated when he failed to correctly spell a German-derived word. In preparation for his third attempt at the prize, Mahankali diligently worked to strengthen his area of weakness. "This year I prepared German words and I studied them, so when I got German words this year, I wasn't worried," he said after his victory.

No one has yet invented a way to magically acquire knowledge—or anything else worthwhile—without effort. If we are going to learn what we need to know to succeed in life, whether in our ministry, our career, our family, or even our hobbies, we are going to have to devote the time and effort required to gain the skills and knowledge we need...and then continue to devote the time and effort required to maintain what we have learned. Preparation for success!

Do you ever dream of what the church could be? It is called having a vision for ministry. One of my favorite passages of scripture is found in Ephesians 3:20:

²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

I like to dream big...especially when it comes to what God can do when we cooperate and give Him full control. Ministry is all about the never changing truths of the gospel presented in a creative, out-of-the-box style that opens doors with seekers to have a conversation about God.

I pray that revival would break-out within the walls of our building and outside of our walls in our community! For revival to take place, there are things that need to happen!

In an October 30, 2018 blog on "theglobalchurchproject.com" the writer talks about revival. In the article the author states:

... the secret to revival isn't crusades. The secret to revival are practices that enable the church to truly share the love and gospel of Jesus Christ.

Revival happens when Christians pursue practices that bring healing and hope to a broken world. These practices include developing a lifestyle of prayer, living as daily witnesses to God's grace and love, welcoming strangers to our homes and tables, being repentant and humble, living with integrity and protecting the weak and the vulnerable, and loving our neighbours and communities. This means being the kinds of loving and holy and peacemaking fellowships that people want to be a part of. These practices mean living out the gospel of Jesus Christ with great passion and humility, and expressing that in our peace, justice, reconciliation, truthfulness, compassion, welcome, and life together.

Israel has come to a unique point in their history. They have crossed the river and are living the culmination of promises begun some 800 years before to Abraham. The people have miraculously crossed the Jordan. They have set up a memorial to remember God's goodness, power, and might. Now they face the first major military hurdle – the walled fortress city of Jericho. Everything seems to perfect for the people to move forward and take the land...and God has something else planned for them.

Let's hear the story from Joshua 5:1-15:

5 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.

Israel Reestablishes Covenant Ceremonies

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.

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

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.

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. **11** The very next day they began to eat unleavened bread and roasted grain harvested from the land. **12** No manna appeared on the day they first ate from the crops of the land, and it was never seen again. So from that time on the Israelites ate from the crops of Canaan.

The LORD’s Commander Confronts Joshua

13 When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, “Are you friend or foe?”

14 “Neither one,” he replied. “I am the commander of the LORD’s army.”

At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. "I am at your command," Joshua said. "What do you want your servant to do?"

¹⁵ The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did as he was told.

PEOPLE NOTICE GOD (VS.1)

The Children of Israel were hard to ignore. Over the forty plus years that they had been wandering the Sinai desert, the pagan nations knew exactly who they were. Now they had crossed the Jordan in the same manner in which they crossed the Red Sea and the Canaanite cities were not happy.

Rumors, true or false, have a way of travelling and people react in different ways. The sheer magnitude of the plagues that befell Egypt should have made Pharaoh a believer in the one true God...and it came close...but then Pharaoh hardened his heart.

We are told that the Amorite and Canaanite kings heard of the rumors of these people whose god parted the Red Sea. Over the forty years, numerous battles were fought and won by the Israelite God. In our story of Rahab and the two spies we learn that the people had heard about the mighty accomplishments of the Israelites, and it scared them enough to be watching for spies to enter their kingdom.

Now the moment of truth is upon the inhabitants of the land. Jericho was terrified and the people wondered when the attack would happen.

For Israel, they had to make a choice. Fear can go both ways. We tend to know our own fears and not to acknowledge the fears of others. All too often we buy into the world's critique of Christianity, and we get an inferiority complex. We start to question our own beliefs, our faith waivers, and some part of us wonders if God really can (or will) act on our behalf. We forget our identities in Christ!

As Christians, we know to whom we belong! The true pagan doesn't have the slightest idea of where they have come from, why they are here, and where they are going. This means that the non-believer must "create" a purpose for themselves, they must "create" a sense of self-worth. The Christian identity answers all those questions and more. As a Christian, we encounter Jesus' grace and forgiveness as we confront our sins and failures. Peace comes from the realization that God has removed and erased our failures when we sincerely repent and ask for forgiveness.

An atheist, at some point, must confront the rumors of the existence of God and decide. Our hope would be that those who must decide are infused by a grain of doubt in their own disbelief that would spur them on to further information, discussions, and exploration.

The Canaanite gods that Jericho worshipped were easy for them to handle. Made of clay and wood, the fertility gods were never seen parting waters, providing manna and quail, or leading with a pillar of cloud by day or a pillar of fire by night. In fact, the Canaanite gods were never seen at all. The Canaanites had their own spies that brought back verified reports of the Israelite's God. If that didn't scare them, the fact that thousands of people just crossed into their territory, seemed to be preparing for war, terrified the people.

They compared their lumps of clay and wood that never responded to them to the God of Israel who could control the raging waters of the Jordan...as our scriptures read: **"...their hearts melted..."**

When God acts, people notice!

If we call ourselves the church, we need to realize that people are always watching us. Fair or unfair, you represent God, and people will be watching how you represent your faith. People will hear our words and promptly judge if our actions match.

RENEWAL BEFORE ACTION

The Canaanite's spirit is devastated by God's power and might. It is now the perfect time for Israel to attack Jericho! You would have thought so – but God wanted the people to get their priorities straight. What was Israel's problem? They had been disobedient.

On ongoing problem, even today, is the idea that somehow God must work according to our agendas and schedules. At times He expects us to practice patience and trust Him. God needed the people to stop and take the time necessary to get their hearts right with Him. How were the people disobedient? They had neglected two very important parts of the Mosaic law while they were wandering in the wilderness.

The first law was circumcision. Circumcision, the foundational ritual whereby you joined in the covenant relationship and privileges offered by God. When a male child was eight days old, they were circumcised. Other groups practiced circumcision, but God had commanded that this would be the sign of His covenant people. God had established this ritual with Abraham in Genesis 17 and it was required of all who would eat the first Passover meal before Pharaoh let the people leave Egypt.

All the Hebrew men who left Egypt had been circumcised, but as new generations were born, the ritual was neglected. The faithless group who refused to enter the land was doomed to wander the wilderness until they died. The new generation was now in the Promised Land but had not been circumcised. Only Joshua and Caleb were circumcised as they were from the Egyptian generation. Now they needed to be obedient once again.

There is a strange irony in God's requirements. At the time when the people of Jericho were the most scared, the people of God were at their most vulnerable. All the males including those who would be in the military. Were in their tents helpless while they were recuperating.

The people needed to heal in two different ways before God would lead them forward. They had to heal physically, and they had to heal spiritually.

In Egypt, God's people were enslaved and humiliated. They were abused and beaten. God freed them from their humiliation and made them a strong and free nation who were entering the land of promise. Circumcision is a physical sign of their freedom. It is a token of the dignity that was replacing generations of slavery.

How else were the people disobedient? They ignored the rite of circumcision, and ***they ignored the command to celebrate Passover.***

The Israelites were supposed to have regularly celebrated Passover as a way of expressing their thankfulness to God, but they had not celebrated it for the forty years after they had received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Finally, the people celebrated God's deliverance and were once again united spiritually together through the celebration. Passover has been celebrated by the Jewish society ever since this time.

You cannot go forward with God's blessing if you are systematically living in sin. Revival demands change and recommitment in word and deed.

FOR US TODAY

How does this Israelite experience apply to us today? Circumcision and the Passover celebration play very little into our daily lives and hold very little meaning for we Baptists. We tend to forget that Jesus did not abolish the requirements, he fulfilled them. After Jesus died and rose again, circumcision took on a whole new spiritual meaning. Paul tells us in Romans 2:28-29:

²⁸ For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹ No, a true Jew 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. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.

We are still part of a covenant relationship with God through a relationship with Jesus. Rather than the outward physical sign, we have now been called to a spiritual relationship as seen by the "circumcision of our hearts." Many of us do not celebrate the Jewish tradition of Passover but we are still called to remember the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God and how that we are still saved by the Lamb's blood. We now call it "The Lord's Table" or "Communion." We remember and are thankful for how we have been saved.

Have we neglected the things of God? Have we been wandering in our own wilderness trying to achieve our own successes without God? It has been over 3000 years since Joshua called the people to renewal and recommitment and as we examine our service to God, we find that spiritually there is very little difference and the call to commitment is still the same. Within my short time on this earth, I have witnessed a troubling decline of church attendance, baptisms, and service. The church is battling indifference, secularism, complacency, and compromise. We cannot expect the state of the church to change until we are willing to remember what is important and we put our devotion to God first. They say that Christianity is only one generation from extinction. May we circumcise our hearts. May we eat at the Lord's Table and remember. May those who watch us, especially our children, the next generation coming behind us, find us faithful in word that is seen in deed.

When God is at work in us people will take notice. It's all the more important that we reconsecrate ourselves individually and corporately, allowing Him to work those changes in us that are necessary and to offer His provision. God is our leader, and he goes with us into battle.

Let's pray...