

A fresh start

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, at home we have an internet router. Now, for those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, an internet router is a little box that gets internet from our phone line and magically sends it through the air to our computer and to our cell phones.

I don't know how it does that. It's some kind of dark magic. It's beyond the knowledge, I think, of mere mortals. But amazing as that magic is, it's not perfect.

There are times in our home when the magic stops and when we lose internet connection. And when that happens, we've found that we have to perform a little magic trick of our own to get it working again, a kind of an incantation.

What we do is we switch the whole thing off, we unplug the power, and then, this is the key, we wait for 10 seconds. And then we switch it back on and magically it's restored and it's working again. Now, I don't know why it does that, but somehow waiting for that 10 seconds is all important.

I don't know if you have a router, but you always have to wait for 10 seconds. And initially, I thought that was just part of the magic. But then, later I discovered there's actually a practical purpose to that and there's no magic involved at all.

[1 : 09] Apparently, it's all about capacitors and that hold current. And if you don't wait for them to drain, then the router won't get a clean start. It won't reset properly when you switch it back on, which is apparently essential to fix it, to get the signal again, this fresh start.

Now, don't you find that's often how it is with technology? That sometimes, when there's a problem, it just needs a fresh start to get it fixed. I know the number one computer help desk solution for any problem, you know what it is?

Have you tried switching it off and on again? Have you heard that when you try to fix a computer? Apparently, that fixes 90% of all technical problems, just switching it off and on again, just have a fresh start.

But now, I don't think that just applies to technology. Think about it. I think it applies to you and me as well, to people, a fresh start. People, you know, when people find themselves stuck in a rut in life and nothing's really happening and they can't seem to move forward, sometimes the best thing for a person is a totally fresh start and moving to a new city or getting a new job, whatever it is.

The importance of a new start. Well, that really introduces what our passage is about this morning in Joshua chapter 5 because as we turn our attention to this chapter in the book of Joshua and as we catch up with the nation of Israel, it seems that that's exactly what they needed, this fresh start as they were entering the new promised land.

[2 : 31] They had just crossed the Jordan River to start their new life in the land that God had promised them, that God had promised to give them. But before they could actually do that, in the next chapter of Joshua, we've got this chapter here, which is all about them resetting from their old life, their 40 years that they spent in the desert, so that they can have a fresh start in this new life without any of the baggage that went before.

That's really what this passage is about. If you want to understand what's going on here, it's about having a fresh start and how God gives the Israelites a fresh start. But we find out when we read that, we find out that he did it in a rather strange way.

In verse 2, he commanded that all the Israelite males be circumcised. And that word, circumcised, uncomfortably appears a lot in this passage. And so it's obviously quite important.

For those of you who don't know, circumcision is the removal of the foreskin of a man's parts. Which would be bad enough without them having to do it with flint knives.

I mean, come on. Ouch. That's, yeah. Anyway, not to mention that this was in the worst possible time because they had just crossed into the Canaan region for war.

[3 : 51] Now, we pick this up at the beginning of the passage. It just, the setting, the time. They had just crossed into, to fight the enemies. And the enemy was vulnerable.

They were scared. They were confused. They didn't know what to do. This was the perfect time to press home the attack. And yet, no, they had to stop and be circumcised. Which is serious enough to put Israel's fighting men out of commission for a number of days.

So it's not the best time to do it. And yet, that's what God wants them to do. God obviously feels it's very important for them to do it in order for them to be ready to go and live their new life in the land.

Now, not only, when we read this, not only do we wonder why it was so important for them to do this rather strange thing, but also what significance does it have for us today? All these centuries later.

You know, this was thousands of years ago in a totally different culture. And except for medical reasons or if you're Jewish, we don't generally circumcise our men. So what does this have to say to us?

[4 : 52] Does it have anything to say to us today, this passage? Or should we just skip over and get to the action? Well, yes, it does have something to say to us. Because it's, well, it's in the Bible.

And everything in the Bible has something to say to us. It's God's word to us. Everything in the Bible was there, deliberately put there by God through the agency of people to make sure that we read it today.

And it has something to say to us today. And this has something to say to us because, remember, what we've previously learned the last couple of weeks as we've been following the Israelites in the book of Joshua, we've learned that everything that happened to Israel entering the land back then is a picture, a foreshadowing of God's people in every age entering into their promised land, which is eternal life in a new world one day.

And this foreshadows that great entry into God's ultimate promised land. Because, you see, that's what God wants to offer us. God offers all people the chance at a new life, the chance at a fresh start, the chance at a life in a world like this world is meant to be.

Because we all know deep down inside this world is not meant to be like this, don't we? We have this sense, even though we've never seen it, sense of something better, sense of what it's meant to be. Well, you see, God wants us to experience that.

[6 : 15] And he offers us that. And that's what the gospel message is about. And that's what we as a church exist to make known. And that's why we want to do this movie night and supper night later in the year. Because God is offering people a new life and they need to know about that.

And we want to tell them about it. A new life in eternity, without death or sin or suffering or pain. The life that God has always intended for us. The life that God made us to live.

And that life is possible for any of us. But, just like something needed to happen here before the Israelites could enter their new life. Something that set them apart from the rest of the world.

Something that marked them out as God's people. So, something needs to happen to us before we can enter our new life. You see, it doesn't happen automatically.

And that's key to understand this morning. And so, what is that? What needs to happen for us to enter new life? Well, the first thing we see in this passage is that we need to put off our old life.

[7 : 18] Which makes sense, doesn't it? In order to enter new life, you need to put off the old. And all of God's signs in the Bible, that is, people take part and have a deeper meaning.

They're not arbitrary. You know, it's not like God was sitting going, hmm, what kind of sign can I make to mark my people? Oh, circumcision. That'll test them. Let's see.

You see, it's got a deeper meaning. It's got a significance. Now, this one, it's a painful sign, sure, but it's a meaningful sign. Because it represents a putting off of the flesh.

That's what it's meant to represent. That's what it's meant to picture. A getting rid of part of us, essentially. And so, when God commanded the Israelites to be circumcised, He was effectively telling them to get ready to get rid of a part of who they were.

Which was represented by the skin they cut off. To get rid of the flesh. To put off the flesh. To get rid of that part of them which was associated with their old life.

[8 : 16] With the sinful lusts and the priorities of this world. In order to begin the new life as God's people. Dedicated to living for Him. Well, if that's what you want in your life.

To have a new start. To be dedicated to living for God. To live the life that God has called you to. And I sincerely hope that that's what you want in your life.

And the question is, how do you put off your old life? So that you can live the new life. I can see the men starting to get uncomfortable. Especially.

You know, does that mean we have to go and book our surgeon's appointment now? No. No. Because let me read from Colossians 2. And see, the sign for Israel doesn't apply to us today.

But the principle behind it does. Listen to what Paul writes to a group of early Christians in Colossians 2. It's what Adrian read for us earlier. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.

[9 : 13] And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In Him you were also circumcised. With the circumcision not performed by human hands.

Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ. And so here you see Paul teaches that the sign of circumcision is a putting off of the flesh.

But the way that we do that as Christians today in this world, in this covenant, in this generation, how do we put off our old life and begin the new? Well, it's quite simply by coming to Jesus Christ.

Do you see that? That is how, essentially, we do what the Israelites were doing before they went ahead and entered their new life. We do it by putting on Jesus Christ.

By coming to Jesus Christ in faith. Because when you do that, according to this passage in Colossians, you effectively become circumcised in your heart. Your flesh, your worldly flesh is cut off.

[10 : 12] And the reason is because coming to Jesus involves a radical change of priorities. Anybody who's truly come to Jesus will know that when you come to Jesus, when you put your faith in Him, your life changes, your heart changes, your priorities change.

And that's what the sign of circumcision was always actually meant to point to. Even back in Deuteronomy, even before Joshua, we read the promises of God to His people.

I'll just read them to you. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

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. And so you see, the outward act of circumcision was only ever pointing to an inward change of heart, which happens today when someone puts their faith in Jesus Christ.

In other words, let me put it this way. You don't put off the old life by following a bunch of rules. I can't emphasize this enough.

[11 : 20] You know, it would be easy for me to stand here and give you a bunch of rules to follow. Things to do. Very easy. And easy for you. You know, it's easy to have a list of stuff to do. Things you must do to put off the old life and live the new.

You know, you need to read your Bible every day. You need to go to church regularly. You need to go to Bible study. And then you'll be a better Christian. And I know, I know many preachers are preaching that kind of message right now.

Just giving a list of stuff to do to be better. To be a better person, a better Christian. But you see, the Bible doesn't do that. The Bible doesn't give us a bunch of rules we must follow to be better.

The Bible gives us Jesus in all His glory. And it's as we trust and follow Him. And as we find our righteousness in Him and not in the works that we do.

It's then that our heart changes. From the inside out and not from the outside in. You see the difference? You know, I could be standing here preaching you outside in change. Trying to get you to change your behavior so you change inside.

[12 : 20] But the Bible doesn't do that. The Bible presents an inside out change. And that is a very important difference. To give you an example of what I mean.

I recently, over the last few weeks, have been trying to fix some rust on my car. I don't know if any of you have ever fixed rust on a car. It's not an easy job.

The rust appeared a number of years ago in the gutters of my car above the doors. You know, where the roof racks fit in. And the thing is, I had already fixed that rust.

A few years ago, when I first noticed it. I took the car around to my father-in-law's workshop. And spent a number of weekends grinding away the rust from the outside. And treating it and painting over it.

And it was all done. And it was done and dusted. Job done. Until, a few weeks ago, when it rained really hard. Remember we had those days of rain a few weeks ago? My car started leaking.

[13 : 19] I started driving along. And then water started dripping onto my head. And I was very confused. I didn't know what it was. So, you know what I did? I went home one afternoon. I ripped out all the interior of my car.

The roof, the floors, everything. Because I was a bit cross. And so it helped to, you know, expend some energy. But it's when I did that that I discovered this. You can see that?

It's a little hole. Well, it was in the ceiling of the car. But I couldn't see it. The rust that I had treated from the outside all those years ago had still been growing on the inside.

And so I hadn't really fixed it. I needed to deal with it on the inside first. And only then would it actually stop. And that's what I'm busy doing. So if you've got a free weekend and you want to come help me treat some rust on my car, then feel free.

But you see, the point. In the same way, we can't put off the old life in order to enter the new just by making some outside adjustments. Just by treating the problems, the sin on the outside.

[14 : 21] Just by putting a few good habits into place. No. You know, good habits are good. And they're great. Bible reading and church, they're all very important.

But they're not enough. We first need to be treated on the inside. We need an inward change of heart, an inward circumcision. But that change is not easy.

And that's another thing we learn in this passage. That inward change that God is seeking is not easy. Truly trusting and following Jesus is not easy. Jesus himself said, Whoever would follow me must deny themselves.

And that's a big ask. To deny ourselves. And just as an Israelite had to be willing to endure the pain of circumcision. I mean with flint knives as well.

We need to be willing to endure the sacrifices that Jesus will call us to when we trust and follow him. Sacrifices of time. Sacrifices of money. Sacrifices of ambition.

[15 : 21] Sacrifices of focus in life. Sacrifices of the flesh. Sacrifices of our old life. Getting rid of it. Putting it off. Which is not easy. And the question is, are you willing to put that off?

Are you willing to put off parts of your old life? And make those sacrifices that Jesus calls you to. Because you see, just like then, willingness to make those painful changes, to put off the old, is what marks out the people of God today as well.

Willingness to sacrifice. Sacrifices. You know, that really is what causes God's people to stand out and be different from the world. Because this world, especially in our culture, is not willing to make sacrifices.

No, comfort is the great God. And Christians, God's people, should be those who stand up and are willing to endure pain.

Painful sacrifice for God and for others and for God's kingdom. So ask yourself, are you willing to do that? Are you willing to take on the painful sacrifices that are part of being one of God's people?

[16 : 31] Put off the old. But equally important is putting on the new. Right? That's the next stage of entering this new life, is actually putting on the new.

Many people will try hard not to sin. Their whole lives. And they'll work to put off the old life and they'll struggle to do that. Their whole lives.

They'll struggle to put off and, you know, build good habits into their lives and try not to sin. But they'll do that and struggle without ever actually starting to live their new life.

They'll try to put off the old without starting to live the new. It's very possible to do that. And they wonder why they keep slipping back into the old life. Well, it's because they've never put on the new. Well, they've never started living the new life.

It makes me think of someone trying to step from one boat to another. I don't know if you've ever witnessed that. If you've ever seen it before.

[17 : 27] But typically, especially if they're not used to boats and they're a bit unstable, they step over from the one boat to another, but it's a bit unstable. And so they've got one foot in the one and one foot in the other, and they're not going to quite commit to stepping into the other boat.

And so they're half in one and half in the other, and then the inevitable happens. You know what it is? The boats start drifting apart. And then they don't know what to do, and eventually they, more often than not, end up in the water.

Well, I think that, you know, the same can happen in this movement from the old life to the new life that God is calling us to. We try to leave the old, but things get unstable. Life changes. You know, all these new demands and these new sacrifices we're called to make.

And we hesitate to fully leave the old life and enter into the new. And so we, you know what, we end up in neither. We end up falling in between, splashing in the water. Well, you see, what we see on the banks of the Jordan with Israel is that God didn't want them to just put off the old.

He also wanted them to start living their new life. We see that a bit later. And it's just as vital for us to start living the new life now, that we can properly leave the old behind.

[18 : 39] And that's vital. We need to jump in and commit to this new life and fully leave the old life behind. And what we go on to see in this passage is that there's two aspects that are vital to living this new life.

And before we finish this morning, I want you to see what these vital two aspects are to living this new life, to fully committing and living this new life now in our lives today.

Look at verse 9. Firstly, this is the first aspect. Then the Lord said to Joshua, Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.

Okay, this is after they were circumcised. The previous generation of Israelites that had come from Egypt had rebelled against God. I don't know if you're familiar with the story.

They had sinned, and their punishment was to wander in the desert for 40 years, never to enter the promised land. And they had all died off. And this generation, their children, were now entering the land, but with the baggage of their fathers, with the stigma of the sins of the previous generation.

[19 : 45] And as a nation, they still hadn't put things right with God. Well, you see, that's what God does now. When they show that they want to put off the old life, he obliges by wiping clean the sins of the past here, by taking away the baggage to give them a fresh start.

That's what he means by removing the reproach of Egypt. It was something they couldn't do for themselves, something that God did for them. Well, you see, that's the same thing that God does for every person who comes to Jesus.

Jesus didn't come to earth just to call us to follow him into a new life. He came to pay for the sins that are keeping us stuck in the old life, when he died on the cross for those sins.

Because if he hadn't done that, you see, if he didn't die for those sins, our sins would still be weighing us down today. The guilt of our sins would still be weighing us down. The temptation of our sins would still be pulling us back.

Our past sins would be condemning us and preventing us from entering this new life. And our present sins would continually hijack the process of trying to change. You know what I mean?

[20 : 55] That if you don't know that your sins are forgiven and they're not wiped away, they will continually pull you back, pull you back whenever you sin.

You have a time when you're living God's way and then suddenly you sin and it all falls down and you think, well, what's the point? I can't do it. And so you don't even try anymore.

Or maybe you want to live God's way, but you've got a deep, dark, dirty secret of the past that you've told no one. And it's that and the guilt of that that keeps you from actually entering into full relationship with God, with a holy God, because of the guilt.

You always want to hold back. Well, you see, that's the shame of sin that's stopping you from entering new life. But that's the shame that Jesus came to take on himself so that you don't have to bear it anymore, that it can be removed if you trust in him.

The knowledge that your past sins are no more in God's eyes and that even the present sins you commit are already atoned for. That knowledge, when you come to realize that, that every time you sin, you can say sorry and leave it at the cross.

[22 : 08] When you truly grasp that, that's when you experience true freedom, freedom to move forward, freedom to live your new life. You know, it's like taking a heavy pack off after a long hike.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever done like a day long hike and you've had this heavy pack and you take it off at the end of the day? And how do you feel? You feel like you can walk on air. You know, you just feel light. You feel free. Well, that's what it's like to take off the guilt of sin and to realize that Jesus has taken it all away and he's offering that to you.

And it's when you take that off that you can freely live this new life that he's calling you to. And that's what happens when someone experiences grace. That knowledge that all your sins, past, present and future are already wiped out.

That God loves you even when you mess up. Even when you're not the person you should be. He loves you and nothing can change that. Because Jesus was the person you should be.

And that's who God sees when he looks at you if your faith is in Jesus. And in fact, knowing that forgiveness and walking in that freedom is the only way you can ever live the life that God is calling you to.

[23 : 21] Not in this. And I don't want. I don't want this church to have people who think that living God's way is about coming and listening what the preacher is telling us to do and having to do more.

And I can never quite do it. And I know that I've done a whole lot of bad stuff that I haven't told anyone about. You see, that guilt, Jesus has come to take that all away. To remove the reproach of sin so that you can live in freedom.

And I want you to enjoy the freedom that Jesus died to give you. That's the first aspect to living our new life. Enjoying that freedom of forgiveness.

The second aspect is enjoying eternity now. There's an interesting note in verse 10 to 12. After Israel had done all this in preparation for taking the land. Look what happens.

I'll read it. On the evening of the 14th day of the month while they camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land.

[24 : 21] Unleavened bread and roasted grain. The manna stopped the day after they ate the food from this land. There was no longer any manna for the Israelites. But that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

Now, why is this note in Joshua chapter 5? What's the point? Well, you see, notice that the Israelites were starting to enjoy the produce and the blessings of their new land already.

Before they had even conquered it. What do you think of heaven? Which is significant. Because in the same way, God calls his children, even now in this life, to taste the blessings of eternity.

To taste the blessings of the life to come. Which is the joy of intimate relationship with God. Because after all, you know, that'll be the best thing in heaven.

When we think of heaven, what do we think of? What do you look forward to? If you think of eternity, think of the new creation, think of heaven. There's so many things to look forward to, so many blessings. To enjoy this world the way it was meant to be.

[25 : 22] But the greatest blessing, the thing that we should be looking forward to the most, is knowing God. And experiencing God without any hindrance. Experiencing Him in all His glory, which is what we were made for.

To enjoy God fully. Without limits. And it's the Holy Spirit in us, who Paul actually describes as the first fruits of eternal life, who enables us to enjoy a relationship to God even now.

I'm really glad the cloud parted right there and let the sun in, because that's a perfect illustration of what I'm saying. You know, we're in this dark building. But outside is a day.

It's a day dawning. And it's fully kind of bright now. But we're still in here. But you know what? We have the sense that there's a day out there. We have the sense that there's this bright, sunny day.

And I hope it will be bright and sunny. Otherwise, my illustration will fall flat. But you get the point. We're starting to experience outside, even while we're inside. We're starting to experience the light of this day, even while we're sitting in here.

[26 : 25] And in the same way, while we're in this life, God is shining the light of His Holy Spirit and His presence into our lives, so that we can experience the day to come, the eternal day that He has ready for us.

We are already experiencing the light of that if we have God's Spirit in us. And so we can enjoy relationship with God even now. So let me ask you, are you doing that?

Are you looking out the window to the day? Are you starting to enjoy the blessings of eternal life even now? Because that is a fundamental part of living your new life. It's enjoying the blessings of that life now, just like Israel enjoyed the blessings of Canaan before they even conquered it.

Because it's only when you do that, you know, it's only when you find a greater joy in the things of heaven than the things of earth, that you can go forward into your new life rather than be sucked backwards into your old.

So which direction do you want to go this week? Forward into the day? Or do you want to be sucked back into the darkness of this old life which is passing away? Well, you put away your old life by following Jesus and allowing Him to change you from the inside out, no matter what that costs, no matter what sacrifices He asks you to, will you do that?

[27 : 41] Will you live in the true freedom of complete forgiveness that He offers you? And will you start to live your new life now and enjoy, above all other things, enjoy the relationship with God that you were made for?

Will you do that this week? Well, let's pray that that will be the case. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that even in a passage like this, You have so much to say to us.

We thank You for the promise of the new day. We thank You for the promise of eternity. We thank You that You want us to experience new life. And You've done everything in Your Son, Jesus, so that we can, so that we can put off the old and start living the new.

But help us to do that, Lord. Help us to truly put off the old and make the sacrifices necessary to put off the old. And help us to enjoy the blessings of the new life You give us in daily, constant relationship with You.

Help us to learn to enjoy You and love You above all other things. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.