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The Sign of Circumcision

Well, I have been talking about defining all things by a Person. And I think that we'll get back to that soon. But I got a little side tracked by the Lord this week on a particular topic, and I feel it would be silly of me not to share that which is the most clearly in front of my heart right now.

Someone once told me never to search the Scriptures until I have my next sermon. But only to search the Scriptures until I see Him. And when I see Him, then I won't need to find a sermon, I'll just speak of what I've seen. I think that's pretty good advice.

And what I saw this week more clearly than ever was the sign of circumcision. Now that might sound a little funny at first – Jason, what's wrong with you that you got excited about circumcision? But, let's just see if you'll get a little excited about circumcision as we go on.

Now let's review just a little about what we've mentioned before about circumcision...and let's do it by looking at the diagram that we've been using. What was circumcision? It was a sign of a covenant. What is a covenant? A Covenant is an understanding or agreement by which two parties come into a relationship.

In order for two parties to walk together as one, there has to be a common understanding, a common agreement by which they relate to one another. And that is what a covenant is. And so the covenant that God made with Abraham had a sign that signified the nature of that agreement. It signified the nature of that relationship. And that sign was the removal of flesh.

And what that always pointed to was the cross. The removal of the foreskin of the flesh, pointed to the removal of the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of the cross. Now look at our diagram. One is the removal of a little piece of the old man over here on the left. The other is the removal of the entire old man so that we could partake of the New Man.

Now, remember here...that's exactly what the cross is. That's exactly what the gospel is. The gospel isn't the improvement of the old man. The gospel is the removal of one nature – the body of flesh, so that we could become partakers of Christ's nature.

Colossians 2:11 "and **in Him** you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in **the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ**"

But until we see that, until we see circumcision, we're going to always be trying to improve the old man and not remove the old man. Until we see circumcision, we're going to try to relate to God in the old man, and not in Christ. Until we see circumcision, we're going to wander around in the flesh eating manna and not entering into the Land. And that's what I want to get to. But let's work our way there.

Lets go back to Abraham. We don't have a lot of time to review all of this, but I'll just refresh your memory by saying that God began to speak to Abraham about a coming Seed. A single descendent that was coming from his loins. And he began to tell him all kinds of things about this Seed.

- He told Abraham that through this one Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed somehow through this Seed. Gen 22:18
- He told Abraham that the Seed would possess the gates of all of His enemies. Gen 22:17
- That God would establish an everlasting covenant between God and the Seed, throughout all generations, and that through that covenant there would be a great inheritance, and everlasting possession. Gen 17:7-9
- He showed Abraham types and shadows of the fact that this Seed would bring life from death. Because the line of the Seed came forth from the dead womb of his wife Sarah. (and then Rebecca, and Rachel, and even Mary)
- And God taught Abraham that the people of the Seed would be a people that received the blessing based on promise, and not on works. Because when Abraham tried to bring about the Seed through works he got Ishmael. But when he trusted in the Lord, he got Isaac "through whom the Seed would come" Gen 17:19)
- He showed Abraham that this promise through the Seed would be by way of a sacrifice of the Seed – for he told Abraham to sacrifice his only son in whose loins was the Seed (and all the promises about the Seed). And for 3 days the Seed was as good as dead in the heart of Abraham as he journeyed to that mountain to kill his son. (Gen. 22:4) But God gave him back to him after 3 days, and replaced him with a ram.

And we can't spend much time on this, but Abraham put his faith in these promises about the Seed. He put his faith in the God of these promises. And that faith brought him a righteousness that was not by works, but that was imputed to him because of his faith. Genesis 15:6 "And Abraham believed God and it was credited to Him as righteousness".

And that faith brought Abraham into a relationship with God, into a covenant relationship with God. And God says to Abraham "here's the sign of our relationship, here's the sign of our ability to walk together, here's a sign of the understanding that has brought us into relationship...its circumcision. Cut the flesh off of all your sons."

Why God? Why is that the sign. Well, nothing Abraham gaining had anything to do with gain by the flesh. Everything he was gaining, was a gaining that came by looking unto Him who is unseen. Looking unto the promise of the Seed. All of it came by faith.

Now, whenever I use the word faith, I feel like I need to define it. So let me just do that for a minute. What is faith? Faith is not hope. Hope is hope. We say things like "I have faith that God will one day help me find my lost puppy dog". Well, what we mean is that we know that God can, and we hope that he will. That's not faith.

Faith is not belief. Belief is belief. And often times we say things like this "I have faith that God can heal the sick". And what we mean is that we believe that God certainly can do such things...though I'm not sure he'll do it in this circumstance.

No, faith is faith. Faith is seeing Him who is unseen. Faith is a spiritual seeing, where you see the substance of the things hoped for. Faith is a comprehension given to you from God, where you can rest in the reality of that comprehension. It's a knowing based on a spiritual seeing. And you can abide in the reality of what is known.

And that is what Abraham grew strong in. He didn't just grow strong in belief. He didn't grow strong in hope. He grew strong in faith. He grew strong in seeing Him who is unseen. He grew strong in seeing a country that was not of this earth. He grew strong in seeing the Land! Lift up your eyes, Abraham! All that you can see, is yours.

And nothing he gained was a gain that came through the flesh. God dealt with that man by faith, and by nothing else. "Leave your home, Abraham, and everything you have, everything you know. Suffer the loss of everything that was gain to your old life". Ok, God...because I see a city with foundation! And I'm heading for that city!

"Abraham, your wife's dead womb will be filled with life". Yes Lord...I see life coming forth from death. Yes Lord I see it by faith.

It was always like that with Abraham. Whether it was his increase of wealth and prosperity, or receiving his son back when he was told to sacrifice him. Abraham received everything by faith, and not through the gain of the flesh.

And so he received a sign of that relationship. A sign of that agreement. A sign of that covenant. And that sign was the removal of flesh – circumcision.

Now, again, his sign was the removal of a piece of the old man to signify this covenant. Our sign is the removal of the entire old man, for us to walk in this covenant. We need to leave the old man and abide in Christ to walk in the relationship.

And that sign is the basis for a relationship. The sign stood for the basis of a relationship. It was not Abraham, but what God would do in and through this seed. It was not Ishmael, it was the promises of God. And here is the sign, Abraham...all of your offspring shall wear on their body the remembrance of the nature of this relationship.

Why are you circumcised Abraham? Because its not I but Christ. Why are you circumcised? Because I tried it in the flesh and only got Ishmael. Why are you circumcised? Because the flesh profits nothing. Because in my flesh dwells no good thing. Because everything I have is a participation in the good of Another.

And so he received a sign of that understanding. A sign of that agreement. Now the fullness of that covenant awaits Abraham. It awaits the coming of the promised Seed. But, Abraham saw it from afar. Abraham saw it through type and shadow, and through God's dealing with Him. Abraham saw the circumcision. He saw the day of the Seed. And Jesus talks about this in John 8.

John 8: 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it* , and was glad.

So Abraham saw something very important. He saw that everything that could not be accomplished in the flesh could be accomplished by faith – it could be accessed by possessing Him who is unseen. Whether its his prosperity and safety, Sarah's womb, Isaac's birth, Abraham's righteousness, living into his prophetic promises.

Look at our diagram again. He saw that nothing of this old life, his own strength, his own planning, his own effort prospered him at all. And so the sign of this understanding was circumcision – the removal of flesh.

And friends, I'm afraid that God is trying to teach us the exact same thing today – even though we've seen the fulfillment of what Abraham saw from afar. Even though we've read the story that He only saw it in type and shadow.

You see brothers and sisters...and this is what I really want to hit on today...our journey to being conformed to the image of Christ can't really start until we see circumcision. Until we see the old man cut off. Until we see the sign of the covenant – which in our case is the fulfillment of the circumcision of the foreskin, it's the circumcision of the entire old man.

And everything that God is trying to do in your life and my life is under the banner of that understanding and agreement. Everything that God has for you, every spiritual blessing, will not be realized and experienced until you've been circumcised of heart. Because these things are yes and amen in Christ. As long as we are trying to get the things of God while we're maintaining our foreskin (if you can pardon the expression)...we're going to get Ishmael's every time.

And some of those Ishmael's may look really good. I'm sure Ishmael was a cute baby. I'm sure Abraham was glad when he was born. He didn't come out looking like a monster. In fact, it says he was pretty sweet with a bow and arrow – but he wasn't the child of promise. Some of our Ishmael's may seem to us to be Isaac's but that's only because we haven't seen circumcision. The betterment of the old man, the cleaning up of the flesh, looks really good, seems really "Christian" until you see that God's got a knife pointed at that entire old man. And he's not really interested repairing your flesh, he wants to circumcise it.

See, most of us have about 5 different lives. And we're trying to prioritize them. You know, we have our home life, and our work life, and our spiritual life, and our social life, and our whatever. And we're trying to put them in the right order. It's like we're trying to get all of our Adamic ducks in a row.

And God comes into the picture and says "Hey guys, I have a flint knife!...and I'm going to cut them all down and form my life in you. And then you won't be anything except what I am made unto you. And yes you'll be a father, and a carpenter, or whatever...but you will be all those things in the understanding of "not I, but Christ"

And so that is what God is trying to do in us. He's trying to circumcise our hearts. And there is no real abiding in Christ until we're circumcised. What are you talking about, Jason. I'm talking about the cross. I'm telling you that the flint knife is the cross. And when you see the cross, you see that the old man has been cut off. You see that there's been a cutting away of flesh. You see that the flesh profits nothing in Christ.

And that's the place it begins. We've talked a lot about God revealing his Son in you. And that's the very first thing you see when God begins to reveal His Son in you. You begin to see a division. There's a dividing. There's a cutting between Christ and you. Between life and death. There's a clear division between light and dark, old and new, the living and the dead.

I was talking to somebody this week and it just thrilled my heart. They were sitting in church during the conference and one of the guys was up speaking and suddenly she began to see the beauty and perfection and otherness of Christ. And as her heart was enjoying that beautiful view of Christ, suddenly she saw herself in that light and said "my God, I am altogether other than Him." (Diagram) She said she saw the absolute uselessness, powerlessness, filthiness, deadness of the flesh, of man (left). And she saw that the cross cut between the two.

And I wanted to say "Praise God sister, you've been circumcised! You got it...you've been visited by the flint knife". Now I didn't say that for obvious reasons, but the cross had brought a clear division between that which is life and that which is death.

And it's a quick cut. It's a clear division. No sooner do you see Him in that light, then you see the enormous division between you and Him. He doesn't circumcise you with a hammer. It's a sharp knife, a clean quick cut. And you see that if there is any hope at all...then the hope is in an increase of Him and a decrease of me.

And see, until this happens to our heart, we wander around the wilderness of the carnal mind not really changing. Never coming to rest. Feeling the reproach of slavery. Feeling the death and confusion of the old man. Why? Because we haven't seen circumcision.

Now I want to show you this in Joshua 5. Here we have the children of Israel entering into the land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. And, of course, the land always speaks of Christ and coming into Him, coming in to dwell in Him. Coming out of the wilderness of our un-renewed mind, into the reality, the realization of being in Christ.

3 So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. (which means: "the hill of foreskins")

4 And 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...

7 And their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way.

Do you see what happened here? 40 years of wandering. Why? They forgot circumcision. Not just forgot to do it, they forgot the covenant that it was a sign of. They forgot the understanding of the relationship...how they related to God. They would not look unto Him who is unseen as their father Abraham did. They would not walk in the reality of circumcision. And so they wandered...because the land is only taken by the circumcised. The land is only inhabited by the circumcised. You can't abide in Christ unless you are exiting out of the old man. I didn't say that...Jesus did. "You have to lose your life to gain mine".

That's why, as you're reading through the Old Testament, you're always bumping into statements like this. "The uncircumcised cannot participate in the feast". "The uncircumcised cannot approach the temple". "The uncircumcised will have no inheritance in the land".

Friends, do you really think that God cares whether or not you have foreskin? No...he cares whether you've seen and agreed with the cross where "you were crucified with Christ and now you no longer live but Christ lives in you". That's the foundation for entering the land. That's the foundation for taking the land. That's the foundation for celebrating the feast, or sacrificing at the temple. That's the sign of the covenant. That's the nature of the relationship.

You don't pack up your flesh suitcase and move into this land. There's a cutting before you can even take two steps into the Land. The uncircumcised shall never inherit the land.

Lets read on in Joshua

8 Now it came about when they had finished circumcising all the nation, that they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.

*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.*

Do you see what that just said. Brothers and sisters, they had been out of Egypt for 40 years. They hadn't seen that place for 40 years. And yet, "TODAY, I rolled away the reproach of slavery from you". When? The day they were circumcised. Not the day they escaped the Egyptians. Not the day the water came out of the rock. Not the day they got quail. Today, the day that the old man was cut off.

When are we going to see that our reproach isn't the bad circumstances that we find ourselves in (diagram – left) ...the reproach is the old man that is defined by those circumstances. And when you cut away the old man, when you're circumcised from the body of flesh...THEN guess what rolls away like the tombstone that tried to block resurrection life? The reproach of that Adamic slavery is rolled away and gives way to resurrection life.

Are you telling me that they could feel that reproach every day in the wilderness for 40 years? That's exactly what I'm saying. But I'm not talking about them, I'm talking about us. We will feel that reproach...the reproach of the flesh, the failure of the old man, the condemnation of Adam, being defined by that old man and his slavery...the slavery of Egypt...UNTIL WE ARE CIRCUMCISED OF HEART. Until there is a cutting. A dividing asunder between life and death.

The journey into the Land begins at circumcision. And that's hard for some of us to hear, but its true.

You see...maybe you thought that the journey begins when you leave Egypt. And certainly that's when your saved. That's when you're delivered from hell. But that's where you left Egypt, **but Egypt doesn't leave you until there's a circumcision.** And then the reproach of Egypt is rolled away.

Now, this is a hard word, friends...but we might as well just face it. We might as well just face right into it...because we'll either face it now or when there's nothing that can be done about it. It's a hard word, but you can be born again and filled with the Spirit...and never truly been circumcised at heart.

The Israelites didn't want to face that...and they fell in the wilderness, but it was still true. The wilderness was not the promised land, and it didn't matter how many tents they set up there. It didn't matter how many miracles they saw.

Did they see deliverance in the wilderness without circumcision? Of course. So do we. Did they see miracles in the wilderness? Yes, so do we. Did they see miraculous provision in the wilderness? Yes, so do we. What about healing? Yep. Pillars of fire and smoke? Yep. Protection from enemies? Yep. Yes, yes, yes...they knew God's ways, they knew God's works, they knew God's laws...but they carried around the reproach of Egypt. You carried around the old man...seeking to live for God while uncircumcised.

In New Testament language...they were born of the Spirit, but walked in the flesh. They were saved, but never lived in the reality of full salvation. They received the mustard Seed of Jesus in their hearts, but that seed never increased into a huge tree. Why? Because they were trying to live uncircumcised – contrary to the covenant. They were trying to be Christ's disciple, without losing their life.

I need to stop, but let me just read one more thing from Joshua 5 really quickly.

13 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?"

14 And 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?"

15 And 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

This is so beautiful. Do you see what's going on here. Joshua has just passed over into the land been circumcised. He's just come into Christ...and he lifts up his eyes and he sees a Man. And He walks up to this man and says – Jesus, are you for me or for my enemies. Diagram – are you for this little thing, or for that little thing on the left. And Jesus answers and says "Son...its not at all about whether I'm on your little side or their little side...its whether you're in Me. Its whether you're in this Man. Whether you're in this Land (right side). Now, seeing where you are...take your shoes off, son...because you've passed over and are standing in a very Holy Land. Take off your shoes, because you're standing in the Son of God.