

## CURRENT CONGREGATIONAL FOCUS

### Current Context

For several weeks here at Cornerstone, we've been having a joint discussion about who we are and where we are as the COVID-19 pandemic wanes. We acknowledge that, in general, things are different. We accept that some of the patterns of life together that we took for granted prior to the advent of a worldwide virus have changed. Some will rebound. Some will return in altered form over time. Some things we cherished in the past will not return at all. We also anticipate that there will be things that we never thought of, or never thought possible, that we will come to embrace and love as if they were old comforts and old friends.

### Current Course

It is in this sense of wonder and opportunity and possibility we have turned to God's word, to the record of ancient Israel at the end of their forty year wandering, on the banks of the Jordan River, at the beginning of an adventure full of God's promise, and power, and presence. We turn to God's people in a life-changing moment of transition under the providence of God, and we ask, **what can we learn of God that will grace our journey in our time?**

### Current Rationale

Such an examination of the past as we make our way in the Spirit into the future is not only biblical, it is essential. Paul, as he closes his inspired letter to the Roman Christians reminds them of the role of God's word in their lives:

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4, ESV)*

God's word offers four powerful pillars for the Christian life and the Christian church today. First, we have in God's word, instructions, a set of directions for living life aligned by the power of God with the will of God for the glory of God and the good of God's people. Instruction is the "how to" and "how not to" manual for walking in God's favor and blessing, for experiencing the fullness of His blessing in joy. **If you want to know how to conduct yourself in such a way as for your joy in God's promise is fully realized, read the word.**

The second pillar God's word offers is endurance. This is *hupomone*. This is holding on with unrelenting tenacity. This is the bite of a snapping turtle. These turtles can be hunted by finding a stick thick enough that the turtle won't bite right through it. You get the turtle to bite the stick, and you can carry that turtle wherever you want, even to a pot of boiling water, because that turtle WILL NOT release that stick. This is the basic attitude of the Christian who has seized the promises of God by faith and nothing can make him let go of his hope that no matter what comes, the kingdom of God will be realized in his life, one way or the other. **God's word nurtures *hupomone*, endurance in the spirit and thus builds determination in the will of the believer.**

The third pillar is encouragement. God's word encourages us. We should be careful here not to dismiss this encouragement as merely a warm, fuzzy feeling of general well-being. This is not the encouragement your emotional senses might get from holding a cute little kitten or puppy that looks up at you with big eyes then curls up and falls asleep in your arms. This is the encouragement of soul and spirit, mind and heart, that comes from Almighty God who moves heaven and earth to accomplish His will in and through you. This is the all powerful work of God the Holy Spirit, a comfort and consolation which resists all assaults and temptations to doubt. This is the encouragement of an impenetrable fortress under siege. **God's word provides the Fort Knox of the heart against the onslaught of the world!**

One more reason to read God's word, to investigate the record of God's work in the past as a guide for following Him into the future: hope. "That we might have hope." Hope is the unwavering certainty, grounded in the holy and glorious character of God Himself, that all He determines and promises will eternally include those who trust Him. I've read the back of the book and God wins, and those who put their faith in Him, those who keep trusting Him, win with Him. **That's the hope we get from God's word.**

It is in light of those four pillars God establishes in us through His word—instruction, endurance, encouragement, and hope—that we have raised three questions together as a congregation and have turned to Joshua and ancient Israel crossing the Jordan River to provide context as we seek our way forward at this time.

The questions we are asking ourselves and one another are simple, personal, and powerful. They each involve a consideration of commitment to Christ, to the word, and to one another.

1. We are asking whether we will commit to thinking about the future together. Will you commit to actively thinking about this congregation and where we might be in a year, or two years, or five years, or a decade? Will you commit to an active role in determining the course of faith and obedience in the days ahead?
2. We are asking whether we will commit to gathering together to pray specifically for the future of our fellowship. Will you commit to making the time to come together and allow us to hear your voice and your heart as you petition God for wisdom and grace and mercy and direction for all of us?
3. We are asking whether we will commit to one another, to the real people sitting next to us, for the sake of God's future. Will you commit to one another, to God's will for each other, to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to disciple and support one another in the manner Jesus gathered and loved and supported His disciples?

**And we are asking God's word in Joshua to provide a context for how God Himself may be present in these commitments and their outcomes.**

Having looked at God's presence with the people at the crossing and in the crossing, we turn our attention this morning to God and His people beyond the crossing. Israel moved to the east side of the Jordan River and camped for three days, preparing to cross the River into the land of God's promise. When the time came, and God called for them to move out, they crossed the

River in faith and on dry ground, and in haste. They made progress! And we come now to Israel on the west bank, on the far side of the River, their feet solidly on the promise of God.

Here in Joshua 5 there are four events that instruct our way forward in God's will at this time.

1. v. 1 Rise of God's reputation
  - a. The kings of Canaan put their defensive hope in the Jordan River
    - i. They trusted something in the natural world to protect them from the supernatural power of God
    - ii. They trusted something created to protect them from the will of the Creator
    - iii. When God removed their defenses by removing the River as an obstacle to His people and His will, they were terrified.
      - (1) A day is coming, according to God's word, when the people of this world will cry out for the rocks and hills to fall on them and hide them from the fury of the returning King, Jesus Christ
      - (2) And they will find no relief in creation from the holy, righteous Judge, the Creator
      - (3) The time to come to faith and trust in God is now.
  - b. Taking in mind their terror at the power of God, it does not surprise us that God is not afraid to put His people into a vulnerable situation in order to advance the knowledge of His glory in the world
    - i. God is going to freshly circumcise His entire army
    - ii. In the midst of their enemies, God is going to purposefully incapacitate His people
    - iii. He is going to make them powerless to draw attention to His power!
2. vv. 2-9 Return to God's covenant
  - a. God willingly wounds His people to exalt his covenant love
    - i. It should shock us, not that God calls for extreme devotion to His covenant, but that He is willing to covenant with us at all
    - ii. **That shock should lead us to marvel all the more at the cross of Christ, where God wounded Himself in order to fulfill the covenant of love He makes with His chosen people**
  - b. God removes the reproach of Egypt
    - i. What does this mean? What is this reproach?
      - (1) Wandering around the desert under judgment rather than living in the promise under grace
      - (2) Wandering around the desert for 40 years as though God had not chosen them and made a covenant with them:
        - (a) "unowned," "Unwanted," "unclaimed,"
        - (b) "not a people"
          - (i) **1 Peter 2:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
          - (ii) Not a reference to pre-Abram
          - (iii) Reference to "pre-Canaan"

- 1) The years of wandering
      - 2) Sociology of the day: Every nation was the product of their faithfulness to their deity
      - 3) Not a nation: have no place and have no god
    - ii. How does God repair their condition?
      - (1) God restores His covenant with them by circumcising them once again, laying claim to them as a faithful people subject to the blessings of His covenant
      - (2) God restores His covenant with us
        - (a) A covenant with God is ALWAYS initiated by God
          - (i) John 3:16
            - 1) For God so loved the world, He sent His Son
            - 2) We did not send Him a request
          - (ii) He took action on His own will, which He willed before the foundation of the world!
        - (b) A covenant with God is ALWAYS implemented by God on His terms
          - (i) The life of Jesus Christ – “be ye holy for I the Lord your God am holy”
          - (ii) The death of Jesus Christ – “the soul that sins it shall die”
        - (c) A covenant with God is ALWAYS insured by God’s investment – the resurrection of Jesus
          - (i) **Hebrews 6:13-14 (ESV) <sup>13</sup> For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.”**
          - (ii) How does God affirm His covenant?
            - 1) With an action no one else could accomplish
            - 2) He raises His crucified Son from the dead, permanently
        - (d) A covenant with God is ALWAYS instituted by God – sanctification (Spirit)
    - iii. What is God’s purpose in covenant?
      - (1) To reconcile lost sinners to Himself by the knowledge of Himself conveyed by Himself through Jesus Christ His Son.
      - (2) God, through covenanting with people of His choice, provides for the occasion and ability to know Him as He knows Himself, that knowledge being the essence of eternal life
3. Release to God’s promise
  - a. God provides for His people until they personally engage the abundance of His promise
  - b. Revelation is the Promised Land of the New Covenant
    - i. The Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance (the certainty of the promise, as the manna was the certainty that God would sustain His people until

- ii. they entered the promise)
- ii. Heaven will be the full realization of the glory of which the Spirit in this life, is just a taste (though a mighty fine taste He is!)
- 4. **Report to God's general**
  - a. God is the commander in chief
    - i. No human representative is the highest ranking authority in the kingdom of God
    - ii. Christ retains all authority and the power for every victory
      - (1) **Matthew 28:18 (ESV) *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.***
      - (2) **1 Corinthians 15:57 (ESV) *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***
  - b. All the authority necessary for our success and all the power necessary for us to move forward, is already provided in Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cornerstone spent 95 years building habits and routines and programs and ministries and reputations that are all, fundamentally, gone. The community we grew up in has changed. The people we grew up with have changed. In the providence of God, we have seen many of our assumptions about life together turned upside down.

Now, by that same providence, we are called to the same faithfulness of heart, spirit, mind, and action as before, but with a different look. We must choose to proceed or perish. We must make progress or pass away. The people of God make progress when they commit to God's covenant, commit to God's method, even when it may call for great faith, and commit to God's people.

**Will you make these commitments as we move forward together in the power and providence of God?**