

Christianophobia

Joshua 5:1

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 9th 2022

I. Introduction - the strangeness of Canaanite fear given the context of verses 2-9

Lord willing, next week we will look at the circumcision of an entire generation of Jews - an operation that would have put that nation at peril of extermination for two reasons: First, they got circumcised on the west side of the Jordan, where all the Canaanites were. They were circumcised right in front of their enemies. Second, the operation would make any movement on the part of the men very painful. They would be vulnerable to attack from those enemies. We will see next week that this mass circumcision was an act of faith in more ways than one.

So why were the *Canaanites* the ones who were so fearful? You would think it would be the opposite. The Canaanites vastly outnumbered the Israelites. They had huge fortified cities. They had chariots, horses, and armies that could have been intimidating to the Jews. We want to delve into this strange fear that the Canaanites had for a bit. I personally believe they were fearful because the demons that drove them recognized the power of God that stood behind Israel. Those demons gave the Canaanite kings an intuitive sense that these Israelites had the advantage. It may not have looked like it, but they had the advantage. And this helps to explain why Christians today are so hated and persecuted in other countries - despite the fact that modern Christians are loving, kind, self-sacrificial, and looking out for the pagan's best interests. The demons behind the pagans know that sold-out Christians are indeed dangerous to their kingdom.

Let me set the stage for this sermon by examining the irrational opposition to Christianity that we are currently seeing in America. And there is actually a new name for it. A sociology professor by the name of George Yancey coined the term "Christianophobia," and I found it humorous that some counselors are trying to encourage people in their psychiatric practices that they have nothing to fear from Christians. After all, Christians are far out of the centers of power. Christians do not control the press, the social media, the schools, civics, big corporations, mainstream science, technology, or the United Nations. They are not a threat - at least, these counselors keep trying to convince people of that fact. And given the escapist theology of most Christians, their worldview is not much of a threat. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that the church of Jesus Christ in America has been neutralized by fear much like the previous generation of Jews in the wilderness had been neutralized by fear and lack of faith. Fear of man and faith in God cannot coexist. And that should clue us into the fact that our current generation is in some ways more like the *wilderness* generation than the *conquest* generation. But that is changing.

Here's the thing - *the past does not have to determine the future*. The past did not determine the future for this generation, and it doesn't need to for us - that is, if we will live by faith in

God's promises. It is astounding how quickly Canaan was conquered in this book. In the next eight chapters Canaan turned from a place of human trafficking, abortion, child sacrifice, statism, and other forms of demonic bondage to a place that valued life, liberty, and the pursuit of justice for all. The difference was not in the Canaanites. The difference was that God's people went from unbelief to trusting all God's promises. And I am so thankful that God is raising up at least a remnant of Christians in America with a faith to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. And I think the demons recognize that. And some of the demonic fear is caught by those who are influenced by those demons. That's my theory.

Obviously there is the issue of timing. God is sovereign. We can't produce revival. Both George Whitefield and John Wesley testified that they preached the same way before and during the First Great Awakening and that their preaching did not have the same effect beforehand at all. They attributed the revival to God's sovereign work alone and not to their own preaching. We cannot produce a revival. Only God can. We can't ensure that God's enemies are judged. Only God can. We can't reverse history. Only God can.

But when it is God's timing, and when God's people live by faith, His power is manifested in our midst in many different and astounding ways, and God's enemies cannot help but notice. And so today's sermon is a call to live in the realm of the supernatural and to not worry about the opposition of the world. Our goal should be to please and serve God and leave the results in God's hands.

But before we look at the first point (that when God acts, people take notice), I want to reiterate the *context* of the next 9 verses because it is so easy to miss. All the men are about to be circumcised. That is a very painful operation, done without anesthesia. During the days when the Israelites were healing, they would have been so sore and unable to move that they would have been sitting ducks for the Canaanites. And if you don't think so, read Genesis 34 sometime. In that chapter we see that once all of the men in the city of Shechem had gotten circumcised, all it took was two people (Levi and Simeon) to kill an entire city of men who had just been circumcised. Why? It was hard for them to move. So it wouldn't have taken much for Jericho to wipe out this army. Yet it is not Israel that is cowering. It is Jericho that is cowering behind the walls of their city. So it took faith for Israel to get circumcised on the Canaanite side of the river. But they were convinced that if God was for them, who could be against them? So we are only going to look at one verse today. I don't usually do that, but this verse is a separate literary unit all by itself. Commentators call those units pericopes.

II. When God acts, people take notice (v. 1)

And the first point in your outline is that when God acts, people take notice. How could they not take notice of the undeniable miracle of the Jordan river parting? Everyone in the city of Jericho would have been able to see that. We saw that the wall of water probably stood at least 120 feet high by the end of the day. It would have been visible from a long ways away.

Granted, seeing that miracle didn't produce any conversions in Jericho. (Rahab was already converted. She didn't need this miracle to get converted.) Though we should all value miracles, and though God does sometimes use miracles in conversions, some people perhaps attribute a little bit too much to miracles. They think, "If only we could perform a miracle, people would come to Christ." That's actually not true. An awesome miracle had already been witnessed by Jericho, and it still took a stand against God. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham told the rich man that if people aren't ready to believe the Bible, they won't believe even if someone was miraculously raised from the dead. That was certainly the case here. There was a miracle of stupendous proportions, yet no one except for Rahab's family and the tribe of the Gibeonites believed. But whether the Canaanites believed or not, they could not help but take notice of God's power. It was undeniable.

A. It was kings, not just common people who were fearful (v. 1a)

We'll start with the leaders. Verse 1 says that *all* the kings took notice. "So it was, when *all the kings of the Amorites* who were on the west side of the Jordan, and *all the kings of the Canaanites* who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel."

B. All the kings noticed this miracle (v. 1a-b)

Why were the kings fearful? After all, they believed in multiple gods. The more the merrier, so why not go along with another god? I believe they were fearful because they saw that *this* God was sovereign and could not be controlled or manipulated by their religion or by their actions. Archaeology shows that the Canaanites liked any and all gods so long as those gods could be controlled a little bit. But Yehowah cannot be controlled. Or to use Mr. Beaver's words, He isn't safe.

And when God begins performing miracles, it makes demons tremble for three reasons: First, because it tangibly demonstrates God's presence and power to both demons and unbelievers. Second because it becomes obvious that this God is unpredictable and cannot be controlled. And therefore He is not just another option among the various religious options. Third, because it shows that God's people are in God's favor and have God's power.

That's why verse 1 doesn't just describe a fear of "God." Because God was working through *Israel*, the last clause says that their heart melted "because of the children of Israel." They had Israelophobia. If the God above all gods is on Israel's side, it makes them fear Israel as well. I find that fascinating. It might help to explain why Muslims, Buddhists, and other demonic groups see Christians as a threat and are constantly trying to destroy their homes, crops, and trying to get rid of them. It may be that since demons recognize that God is with the Christian community that they perceive them as a threat.

Anyway, this chapter will outline other characteristics that God places into a community that is about turn the world upside down, but let's think about the miracle that we looked at in the last chapter.

Miracles frequently happen in parts of the church that are living by faith. And the book of Hebrews characterizes this entire generation as a generation that had faith. It is true that God is sovereign in His distribution of miracles, but He loves to bestow miracles upon communities that walk by faith. When I ministered among the Dalits in India I was somewhat astounded at the number of incurable people who were instantly healed when I would pray for them - way more than here in America. I believe that part of the difference was that they lived in an atmosphere of faith that God can do anything. Part of the absence of miracles in western churches may be because of western skepticism. We westerners are so used to explaining everything in terms of scientific principles that we leave no room for the miraculous, and God does not bless such lack of faith. But Christianity when lived out fully is full of the miraculous.

Let's look next at some of God's purposes for miracles. In chapter 2 Rahab testified that hearing about the drying up of the Red Sea (which we saw was a parallel miracle to this one) made her and her family open to the Gospel. So it *can* have that effect on some. But in this chapter we see another purpose - the miracle took the wind out of the sails of potential opposition. Let me give an illustration of both uses in Ethiopia, where I grew up.

The Ethiopian authorities had captured one of our evangelists and they were going to kill him as an example to others. They called the whole countryside together to witness this public execution and the officials told the countryside that this is what would happen to them if they became Christians. They tied the evangelist up and placed him on the road and ran a big quaterantera (their name for a great big truck) toward him to squash him. They wanted to make it ugly and repulsive in order to scare the people. Immediately before the truck got to him it stopped in its tracks like it had hit a brick wall. The man inside pulled himself off the steering wheel and backed it up to try again. On the third unsuccessful attempt, he opened the door and ran off. Those who had been gathered to witness this execution said, "If this is what the Christian God can do, we want to find out more." And they untied the evangelist, and he had a ready audience to hear the Gospel. So it had a positive effect on some.

But interestingly, even though the authorities saw the exact same miracle, they refused to believe. They continued to persecute Christians and they continued to fight the Gospel. It did at least take some of the wind out of their sails and gave some of them a bit of fear. But they continued to resist the Gospel.

Some years ago in India a group of people was about to beat an evangelist with clubs when somehow the subject of healing came up. The leader of the group had a relative who was dying. He was understandably skeptical, but told the evangelist that if God healed his relative who was dying, they wouldn't beat him. The evangelist went with group, prayed over the relative, and God performed an immediate healing. As a result of this miracle, even though these people did not profess faith in Christ, God gave them a healthy respect for the evangelist that kept them from attacking him. God frequently uses miracles in places where He is powerfully moving in the advance of His kingdom. And in this chapter the leaders of the Canaanites had a healthy fear instilled in them.

C. God overruled the pagan communications to accomplish His purposes (v. 1c-f)

But let's look at each clause in the rest of the verse and see how the pagan communications system (whatever that was), was used to accomplish God's purposes. We can rightly get upset with the pagan media that does everything in its power to hide the truth, distort the truth, misrepresent the truth, and to promote pagan lies. But despite the media's antagonism to God, God often uses even the media of today to promote His kingdom. When MSNBC started persecution against our church a few years ago, it generated a huge increase in people combing through my online archives and reading sermons. They were doing it to find dirt on me, but God used that to impact people with the Scripture - people who would have never read it otherwise. So the gospel impact was exponentially increased. And they eventually recognized that. The homosexual forum called off the negative reporting because it was giving us such good exposure. And many similar examples could be given to illustrate how God can overrule even the powerful opposition of the media.

Well, in this case, we aren't told how this information spread. In chapter 2, Rahab's family heard about the crossing of the Red Sea. We aren't told how. Here, the kings hear the information about the river crossing. We aren't told how. But there is clearly a spreading of information by the enemy themselves. But despite the fact that the information flow was in the enemy's hands, they still got a lot right.

1. They got God's name right (v. 1c)

First, the kings got God's name right. When it says that they "heard that the LORD" had done this miracle, LORD is in all capital letters, and whenever you see that in the NKJV, it is the name Yehowah. They got God's covenant name right. Where in the world did they find out about His name? Who knows? But apparently news of the name of this God had been spreading far and wide because the Gibeonites in chapter 9 said,

"From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of Yehowah your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, 10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.

So even the common citizens of Gibeon had heard some truth even though this news had obviously been passed on by the enemy.

And I bring this up because there is a tendency in our circles to feel hopeless and discouraged in the face of cancel culture, the leftist control of the major media outlets, and other forms of propaganda. We wonder how on earth the population is going to get the truth. It seems like good news is not getting out via the usual media outlets. But God's hand is not limited by the media - as we discovered. He can get accurate news out by some means or another if it suits his purposes. And Christians have been successful in using Twitter, Facebook, Google, Pinterest, and other forums for promoting the good news of the Kingdom.

I'm actually encouraged by the results of a Gallup study that was released this past July.¹ That study showed Americans' confidence in the truth of what the media says went down from 51% in 1977 to 11% this year. Even the pagans apparently don't believe the major media outlets much anymore. Last month they released another study that shows that only 2% of the population said that they could trust the government in Washington, DC "just about always" and only 19% said, "most of the time."²

God knows how to shake the confidence of people in the power centers of a culture. Scandal after scandal has rocked social media and other major media outlets as it has been shown that the media was deliberately falsifying information. Co-founding officer of the CIA, Frank Wisner, said all the way back in the 1960s that the US spy agency had so many assets in news rooms across the country that he likened spreading propaganda through the news media to playing a musical instrument. Now, it may have been hyperbole, but things like that can shake people's confidence.

So the bottom line is that despite this attempt to control stories (and the Kings of Canaan would be very motivated to control the news flow), the text says that at least the kings were getting correct information. So they got God's name, Yehowah, correct.

2. They got the miracle right (v. 1d)

Next, they got the details of the miracle right: "that Yehowah had dried up the waters of the Jordan..." There was no downplaying of the miraculous. They still fought against this God, but they were *not* confused about the fact that He (Yehowah) had performed a stupendous miracle.

3. They got the connection to Israel right (v. 1e)

Next they got the connection of this God to Israel right. The verse goes on to say "that Yehowah had dried up the waters of the Jordan *from before the children of Israel...*" This was not a fluke of nature as some liberals have recently tried to make it out to be in their commentaries - saying that a landslide had reduced the water to a mere trickle. These Canaanites knew better. It was dry. It was a miracle. And that miracle was connected to Israel. This means that the God of Israel is at war with them. They get it. And often the leaders today intuitively know that Christianity is a threat to statism.

4. They got the timing right (v. 1f)

And they got the timing right. The river was dried up only until the last Israelite had crossed. It says, "until we had crossed over..." Then the river began to flow again. This showed the Canaanites that God was watching over Israel. The timing of the parting was precise and was geared to benefit Israel.

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394817/media-confidence-ratings-record-lows.aspx>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/public-trust-in-government-1958-2022/>

All of this shows that God overruled the pagan communications system to accomplish His purposes. And in the same way, we can have confidence that despite the cancel culture that has become part and parcel of social media, God can still overrule their reporting to make sure that essential facts get out. This is a verse that calls us to have faith. Don't have faith in the power of the media or the civil government - that leads to fear; have faith in the far greater power of God - which is the next point:

III. When God acts, people cannot successfully resist Him (v. 1g-i)

When God acts, people cannot successfully resist Him. Don't give too much credit to God's enemies. Scripture asks the rhetorical question that I started with earlier in this service, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). And the rhetorical answer is, "No one."

A. God ensured that they heard what needed to be heard (v. 1g)

First, we see that God ensured that the Canaanite leaders heard what needed to be heard. It says that when they "heard that the LORD had dried up the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we crossed over..." The phrase, "*when* they heard" doesn't tell us *how* they heard. Those kings had their own information networks, but despite controlling those networks, everyone knew that the God of the Israelites had done this deed. They weren't able to spin it otherwise. God's hand is not limited by the enemy's propaganda.

We can complain all we want about the way the government and the media control information flow, but that shouldn't stop us from naming the name of the Lord and fully preaching the truth of Scripture however controversial that may be. God will hide the truth from those whom He wants to harden and He can expose the truth to those whom He wants to hear.

B. Their heart "melted" (v. 1h)

This verse gives two results of this news. The first result is that their heart melted. This is exactly the same Hebrew word (סמ) translated as "discouraged" in Deuteronomy 1:28. In that earlier passage the hearts of the *Israelites* were melted or discouraged when they heard about the giants in the land, the fortified cities, and the unconquerable nature of Canaan. It was the exact reverse of this verse. Here it says that the *Canaanites* hearts were melted or discouraged. What's the difference? It amounts to what one believes. It really makes a big difference what one believes. Your eschatology makes a big difference. The Israelites of the previous generation were looking at life through non-Scriptural eyes in Deuteronomy 1:28, and they thought that what God was commanding and promising was impossible. That unbelief led God to abandon that generation to wander for forty years in the wilderness. But this generation had faith in God's promises and *now* it was only the Canaanites whose hearts melted. If you have a tendency to have your heart melt over the power of the enemy, you are listening to the wrong voices. In any case, the Canaanites knew that they didn't have access to the kind of omnipotent power that the Israelites did.

C. The “wind” taken out of their sails (v. 1i)

The next phrase says, “and there was no spirit in them.” The word רִיחַ could be translated as breath, wind, or spirit. So the phrase is an idiom similar to three English idioms with those three words: 1) God knocked the breath out of the Canaanites or took their breath away. 2) Or to use a second idiom, God took the wind out of their sails. 3) Or a third idiom, they lost any spirit for the fight. God was doing this to benefit Israel. When the world is in the ascendancy it is likely a discipline of the church from the Lord. When the world fears Christianity, it is likely because God has put that fear into them and He is about to do something remarkable through Christians - and I believe He is.

Let me quote from a website discussing how to cure Christianophobia without becoming a Christian. And I’m not recommending this site or this cure; I’m using it to point to the growing “problem” of people fearing Christianity. It said,

For many ...suffering from ... Christianophobia. [They] Don’t always feel the need of treatment because they can just avoid the object of their fear. This gives people suffering from Christianophobia a feeling of control on the problem. But sometimes avoiding the Christians might not be possible or enough. It is important for someone to always seek professional help when possible.

I got such a kick out of that. But it is true that there are more and more people who fear Christianity because it presents God as Lawgiver and Judge - at least Christians who still believe in God’s laws and His judgments. But I would say that the only cure to that so-called condition of Christianophobia is the cure that God gave to the Gibeonite tribe of Canaanites in chapter 9. The cure is called “grace.” By grace He gave them faith to become Christians themselves - and we will look at that in chapter 9. It was a genuine conversion. If there is one thing that is clear in the book of Joshua, it is that God controls all things - even the hearts of individuals. We need not fear the Canaanites or the media or the big corporations or anything else that thinks it can control or manipulate a country. Fear God and serve Him. We were made for that, and any resistance to God’s purposes will eventually become self-defeating.

IV. When God acts, He does so for the sake of His kingdom

The last point is that when God acts, He does so for the sake of His kingdom. We can see this in the last two phrases.

A. The waters dried up “from before the face of the children of Israel” (v. 1d)

The first phrase is that the waters dried up “from before the face of the children of Israel.” That’s an amazing statement, when you think about it. Why does He not say that the waters dried up from before the face of God? That’s what happened right? It was God who pushed those waters back, not Israel. So why does it say that this happened “from before the face of the children of Israel”? I believe it is because God *identified* with Israel, and was *with* Israel,

and did this miracle *on behalf* of Israel. When Israel was doing God's will, God's very presence and power was with them. That means that both ideas are true. And it's also another proof that the wall of water was not 18 miles north; it was right before their face.

B. The will to resist dampened “because of the children of Israel” (v. 1i)

The second phrase was that “there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.” Again, notice that their will to resist was *because of the children of Israel*. God is acting on behalf of His kingdom. The Canaanites recognized that Israel had a power and a presence of God that they did not have. And when the church is indwelt and empowered by God, the world will recognize the difference.

My admonition to you is to not be like the previous generation of Israelites described in Deuteronomy 1:28 - whose heart melted over the Canaanites and whose wind was taken out of their sails. Instead, trust that if God is for us, who can be against us? It is the world that is destined to fall before the sword of the Scripture and to eventually become a Christian world. May the Lord hasten that day. Amen.