

Joshua 3-4 – “Crossing the Jordan”

3:1-3 - *Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. ² So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; ³ and they commanded the people, saying, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.*

The Israelites are positioning themselves to march into the land and inherit what God has already promised them. They all come and camp out at the Jordan before crossing over. And they are told to wait until they see the ark of the covenant moving out.

- The ark of the covenant was the visible manifestation of the presence of God for Israel. It's the presence of God that is to lead us and go before us. We're not to launch out with our own interests or agendas and ask God to follow along. We're to move where He is moving.
- I love how it says, they are to ***go after it***. Now we know that means to follow behind, but I think it's an attitude to have in pursuing God. We need to seek after Him! There are great promises to those who seek God and do so with their whole heart. Those that go after Him in love and devotion.
- **Jeremiah 29:13**, *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*
- **Amos 5:4**, *"For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live;"*
- **Matthew 6:33**, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

But here's the thing, we must always keep the Lord before us. They had to keep an eye on the ark and know when it was on the move. Is Jesus captivating you? Is He your focus? Are we being distracted by so many other things that we're missing out on where He wants to lead us? May we have our sights set on Him.

3:4-5 - *Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before.*" ⁵ And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

But here's the flip side, as much as we're to pursue God and follow after Him, we must recognize the holiness of God. They were to follow behind at 1000 yards. That's a lot of space! There needed to be a reverence and respect towards this holy article. Remember this ark contained the two tablets of the law. And it reveals to us that the law could never bring us close to God. There was a great distance still in place because of our sin. Our good works and righteousness could never bring us close to God, we needed something greater – we needed a Saviour! Jesus has now come to bring us near.

- **Hebrews 10:19–23**, *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."*

Now as they were to follow this holy article, they themselves were to be holy. They're called to **sanctify** themselves, which means to be set apart. But here's the thing we need to keep in mind, we can often think that holiness is accomplished by refraining from certain things, yet our holiness isn't seen just by what we say no to, but who we say yes to. You see, it's not just separating from things, it's being separated unto God. He is holy, and as we draw closer to Him, we are being made holy.

Definitely remove things that are going to impede that progress, separate yourselves from the things of this world, but be certain you don't just stop there. Be set apart to Jesus!

When we're set apart to Jesus; when we're abiding in Him and walking in obedience to His Word, we're going to see Him do wonders.

3:6-13 - *Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. ⁷ And the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. ⁸ You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.' "* ⁹ *So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of*

the Lord your God.”¹⁰ And Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: ¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. ¹² Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. ¹³ And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap.”

God was going to work in a way where He would exalt Joshua. But this was not to make Joshua great, it was to show the greatness of God. It was to confirm to the people that God was with Joshua and was working through Joshua to lead the people of Israel into Canaan.

- We need to be careful that we never fall prey to the desire to be exalted. Ultimately, we have nothing in ourselves to exalt. Anything that's worth exalting in our lives is there only because of God. So He deserves the glory.
- **1 Corinthians 1:31**, *"that, as it is written [Jeremiah 9:24], "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.""*

Now there's some great assurance being given to the priests and to all the children of Israel – and that is just as God held back the waters of the Red Sea in their great deliverance out of Egypt, so too He will hold back the waters of the Jordan for them to take possession of their inheritance.

- Now we see this land being greatly contested throughout history as to who has the right to it. Does Israel have the right to it, have they colonized it? And it's important we get a good understanding as to the history of this land especially considering the days we are living in.
- I hope to take some time after we go through our message to discuss this and give some proper perspective to this war taking place.
- But let me just say this at this point, the land is God's land. In fact, notice what we read in vs. 11, that Yahweh is ***the Lord of all the earth***... He owns it all and He's in control of it all. And He has given the land of Canaan to the Israelites for it to be ***their*** land – the land of Israel.
- **Psalm 24:1**, *"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein."*

And as He rolls back the waters to let them in, He's going to showcase His power in doing so, the same power that will conquer the godless nations there.

3:14-17 - *So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), ¹⁶ that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.*

I'm sure the priests had a lot of questions and doubts running through their minds when they came to the riverbank. And this is no ordinary season. It's when the Jordan is overflowing its banks; when it was at its widest, deepest, and swiftest. This was around springtime when Mt. Hermon's snow was melting and flowing down.

- It's interesting how God waits and does things often times at the most inconvenient time. The most inconvenient time for us I should say, but at a time where His power will be on even greater display. Times where it's so obviously not of us and all about Him.
- Nobody could come back and say, that was no miracle. I've been to the Jordan, people could have crossed over that easily. But did you see it at flood season? Just like how people try and minimize the crossing of the Red Sea. They say it really means Reed Sea and they crossed at a marshy part of the Sea that was only knee deep. Well then you need to explain how a formidable army all drowned in knee deep water. Either way you have a miracle!

So the priests have their priestly garments on, they have the ark of the covenant, I'm sure they're thinking, *'God wouldn't want these things getting wet, would He?'* So why didn't He just stop the waters first, then have them walk in on dry ground?

- I believe it's because as they are entering into new territory, God wants them to learn to live a life of faith. One which walks in complete trust and dependence in Him when there's no other evidence but His Word.
- It was a failure in this area that kept them out of the land to begin with. So now they need to be sure that they are willing to trust God and take Him at His Word as they begin to move into the land.

And God brings them right up to the river and causes them to begin to step into the waters without any sign of God doing anything. This was a real faith tester. But as they moved forward, God moved as well. God held the waters back only as they stepped into the waters.

- It's what we will experience sometimes. God doesn't often say, *'Look I've cleared the way for you, now you can go. Everything is going to be a piece of cake.'*
- We would like it to be more like that. But that's not going to be for our best. God's not just trying to rush you to the destination, He's interested in the journey. And it's in that journey that we have lots of lessons to learn and opportunities to move in faith where we get to see God at work. These are the things that build us up and strengthen us to live with reliance on God alone.
- If we don't learn to walk by faith, we're never going to step out and move forward.
- Sometimes stepping out in faith may require getting a bit wet. But it's there that lessons are learned, and faith is strengthened (ie. Peter walking on water).

So with this scene of overflowing waters, a seeming insurmountable obstacle, F.B. Meyer writes this:

"But when the priest's foot touches them [the flood waters], they shrink away. Jesus has stepped down into these floods as our High Priest. In Gethsemane their overflowing tide washed around Him. At Calvary the water-spouts went over his head. In the grave He seemed momentarily to have succumbed. But since then they have been cut off. Through the ages He has stood, bearing the ark of propitiation, and arresting the tumultuous floods. "Thus far, and no further." Sinful soul, deeply convicted, "Look for the Priest," on whose person the storm broke, and by whom it has been checked and stayed! Tried believer, be sure that the water-floods cannot pass Jesus, to reach or drown thee! His promise to thee is: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the

rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 13:2). And when death approaches thee, O fearful and trembling one, thou wilt find Jesus standing between thee and its might, making a path by which thou shalt pass over dryshod.”¹

Now it's one thing to hold the waters back, but another thing for the people to all cross over on **dry ground**. And we're talking a few million people here all needing to get over. You'd think this would ground would naturally get beaten down and muddy. Yet they all walked over on dry ground. When God is at work, He brings a complete provision and protection.

When we compare the two crossings (Red Sea and Jordan River) they both were crossings of faith.

But the Red Sea was faith unto salvation and deliverance. They were a redeemed bunch leaving the world behind them. The enemy was drowned in the sea and defeated.

And we need to continue to walk by faith now, not unto salvation, but unto the fullness of life; our spiritual inheritance we have in Christ. The enemy may be defeated, but he's still trying to drag people down with him. And we need to be on guard and continue to walk and war by faith so that we experience all that Jesus now has for us in the promise of a saved life.

This sort of victory can only be accomplished through the Spirit. This crossing is a picture now of the baptism of the Spirit. All believers have the Holy Spirit in them, but not all believers are experiencing the overflow of the Holy Spirit leading, guiding and strengthening them. How we need this filling to live a victorious life in Jesus.

And one of the key fruits of the Spirit is a life lived as a witness (Acts 1:8). And chapter 4 is all about witness.

4:1-8 - And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying:² “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe,³ and command them, saying, ‘Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm.

¹ Meyer, F. B. (2004). *Our Daily Homily* (Vol. 1, p. 190). Pleasant Places Press.

You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.’ ”⁴ Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe;⁵ and Joshua said to them: “Cross over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel,⁶ that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ ”⁷ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.”⁸ And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the Lord had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

These 12 men were to establish a memorial of what God had done for them. It was for the purpose of teaching their children the wonderful works of God. We have a tremendous responsibility to raise up the next generation with a knowledge of God and understanding that we serve a loving God who wants to be involved in our lives.

So these stones were to be a practical reminder of what God did on behalf of the Israelites and a point of reference to share this news with upcoming generations.

Exodus 12:24–27, *“And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever.²⁵ It will come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service.²⁶ And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ ”²⁷ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’ ” So the people bowed their heads and worshiped.”*

Deuteronomy 11:18–21, *“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.¹⁹ You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.²⁰ And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,²¹ that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.”*

Psalm 103:2, *“Bless the Lord oh my soul and forget not all his benefits.”*

- But we need to remember than in looking back it needs to spur us on to move forward in the Lord.
- “Glorifying the past is a good way to petrify the present and rob the church of power.” (Wiersbe)
- **Ecclesiastes 7:10**, *“Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.”*

May memorials move us on to greater things – greater trust and faith in the Lord.

Not only were these stones to be set up on the other side of the Jordan, but Joshua set up 12 stones as a memorial in the middle of the Jordan.

4:9-10 - *Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day. ¹⁰ So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over.*

This memorial would be a sweet reminder that their old lives were dead and buried. God delivered them out of their old life and they were to walk in victory and newness of life now.

But it would also be a wonderful reminder of God’s faithfulness. In times of drought when the river would recede, these stones would appear and be a timely reminder of the place where God’s presence led them through and show what a great God they serve. In times of dryness in our life we need to look at and be reminded of God’s goodness and faithfulness that has already been demonstrated in our lives.

In verse 10, notice that the ark remained in the riverbed as everyone crossed over. The nation was being reminded that the presence of God was with them, just as He told Joshua (Joshua 1:9).

4:11-14 - *Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people. ¹² And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them. ¹³ About forty thousand prepared for war crossed over*

before the Lord for battle, to the plains of Jericho. ¹⁴ On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.

Verse 12 highlights the 2 ½ tribes who decided to live on the east side of the Jordan. They promised to come into the land to support their brothers and fight for them. But we read in Numbers 26 that the combined number of those able to go to war was over 100,000. Yet we only see 40,000 coming along. These were tribes that seemed to compromise in moving into the land God was giving them and now we see that compromise increasing.

On that day that God brought the Israelites through, he exalted Joshua in their sight. It was evidence that He was God's chosen vessel to lead Israel. He had been a faithful servant, humbly serving alongside Moses, but now God was blessing him in front of the nation.

- **Luke 14:11**, *"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

4:15-24 - Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, ¹⁶ "Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan." ¹⁷ Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." ¹⁸ And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord had come from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before. ¹⁹ Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰ And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. ²¹ Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' ²² then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; ²³ for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, ²⁴ that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever."

Gilgal means to roll, or rolling. Just as they would roll these stones on top of one another, just as the waters were rolled back and they walked on dry ground, so too it would reveal the mighty work of God in rolling away the reproach of Israel

in the sight of the nation. They would surely know that the Lord is mighty, and the only response is to fear Him forever.