

## A Study of the Book of Joshua

### Sermon # 3

#### Stepping Out On Faith

#### Joshua 3: 1-17

For Christians today crossing of the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another. It is not a picture of a believer dying and entering heaven. Canaan was not heaven it was a place that had to be won by hard work. Canaan is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised.

Tonight I want us to examine some great principles about faith found in Israel's crossing of the Jordan River.

#### 1. FAITH MAY REQUIRE THAT WE WAIT (vv. 1-2a)

"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,

The spies had returned from Jericho and given a favorable report. Joshua orders the Israelites to move to the edge of the Jordan River and wait for further instructions.

The Israelite were to wait when waiting was difficult. Those three days of waiting at the Jordan river were days of preparation for crossing it. The issue of waiting is seen in the first phrase of verse two, "So it was, after three days,"

As they waited they no doubt became increasingly aware that crossing the Jordan River was impossible. The Jordan River that was only about 100 ft. wide most of the year, but during the spring flood stage, which it was now, became up to a mile wide.

As they faced the difficulties there had to be many conflicting proposal being offered. Some of them no doubt were saying, "*Let's go back!*" Some were saying, "*Hey it looks pretty good on this side of the river to me.*" Some no doubt examined the various ways of crossing the river. They could not swim across. They couldn't build enough rafts or boats to transport over a million people. They did not have time to build a bridge. There was only way around their problem and that was through it.

It was a the very time that the people were faced with the tremendous difficulties and they knew that they were at the end of their resources that God would be able to show his power. But it is never about what we can do, it is always about what the Lord is able to do. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians

(3:20) "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us"

Have you ever seen those flashing electronic signs on the highway which say, "Expect Delays" that is pretty sound advise but lets admit it, waiting on God is hard to do!

## 2. FAITH RECOGNIZES THAT SOMETIMES GOD CHOOSES TO WORK IN NEW WAYS (vv. 2b-4)

When it was time to go, God gave the Israelites some specific instructions (vv. 2b-4), “*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. (4) 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.”*”

Previously God had used “the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night” as symbols of his leading, presence and protection. Now God has chosen to lead the people in a new way, by the “Ark of the covenant.” The ark has fascinated people for over three thousand years. Now the ark symbolized the presence and power of God with His people.

The presence of the Ark represented the person and promises of God. Having it led the way, pointed to the fact that as the people of Israel set out to cross the Jordan, invade and possess the land, they must do so not in their own strength, but in God’s for it was God Himself who was going before them as their source of victory.

When we face times of crisis or when we need direction in life, we need to learn to be sensitive to the movement of the Lord in and around us. When God is at work among us and around us we cannot help but expect to hear the call to go forward. When God is at work, we are sometimes moved right out of our comfort zones into the path of new opportunities.

If you are facing a raging Jordan today, it may be your river of opportunity. It may be some habit, or passion, or sin, or critical spirit or sensitiveness. How many times has God called then waited for us to step out in faith? He waits for us to be willing to get our feet wet.

## 3. FAITH MEANS THAT WE ARE WILLING TO STEP OUT (vv. 5-8)

“And Joshua said to the people, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you. (6) 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.’”

Faith was first demanded of Joshua. Joshua’s faith is seen in the fact that he tells the people to prepare themselves because “tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you,” at a time when he did not know what those wonders would be. At this juncture Joshua himself probably did not know specifically how God was going to get them across, except that he believed that the Lord would make it possible for them to cross the river. The specifics had not yet been revealed yet Joshua believed that God would give those instructions when they were needed. But the promise that God would work miraculously was contingent on the people’s willingness to consecrate or dedicate themselves.

Joshua’s faith was based not only on God’s direct statements to him personally but upon previous experience. God has never asked a person to believe in something that is not based on reality and upon

substantial facts. Some people even Christians think that faith is a *"leap into the darkness."* But that is not true. The Christian faith is based on a reliable and trustworthy worthy message. There is more historical proof to trust the Bible and what it says than most other historical records. Joshua's faith was based not only on God's direct statement to him personally but upon previous experience of his having parted the Red Sea.

But in all fairness we need to remember that most of the children of Israel who faced this present crisis represented a new generation. They had not witnessed the parting of the Red Sea or were too young to remember it clearly. Most of this new generation had only heard reports of what God had done. They had not experienced it personally.

Constant movement had characterized Israel's life in the wilderness, the Hebrew verb (*nasa*) usually translated "journeyed" is used eighty-nine times in the book of Numbers. But here in Joshua 3:6 we are told that they are to "cross over." This is a new word (*'abar*) and it is used twenty-one times in the next three chapters. This word emphasizes the decisive nature of this moment in the history of the Jewish people, and distinguishes it from everything that had gone before.

#### 4. FAITH IS AN OPPORTUNITY THAT CAN BE REJECTED (vv. 9-13)

"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."

When Joshua speaks to the people he did not take advantage of this situation to exalt himself. His total focus was on what God had promised. His response no doubt shows us the main reason why God chose to use Joshua in the first place. He could trust him with this leadership role. He did not have to pump himself up or build up his leadership role in the eyes of the people, because he was convinced that God would do that. Someone has said, *"The leader that needs to constantly tell the people that he is the leader, isn't."*

We need to remember that God's destruction of the Canaanite civilization only came after He had issued them warning after warning, that destruction was on its way. From the Red Sea onward, with the miracles in the wilderness, for over forty years now with the Parting of the Red Sea God was warning them to repent. Telling them that to turn from their idols and their wicked ways and worship Him. And make no mistake about it the Canaanites had gotten the message. Remember what Rahab had reported in Joshua 2:10-11, "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. (11) And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath." They had heard but unlike Rahab they had decided not to do anything about it.

When the Jordan waters rolled back God was demonstrating once again his power and majesty to the pagan lost world, to men and women and children whom he loved and whom he wanted to turn to Him in faith and obedience. Their lack of faith was not because of lack of evidence but it the face of overwhelming evidence and in spite of it. He was extending on more opportunity for the inhabitants of Canaan to forsake their false gods of wood and stone and to worship the only true and living God.

#### 5. FAITH AFFORDS GOD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE HIS POWER (vv. 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.”

What faith it must have required for the priest to step off into the water. The priests were called upon to put one foot in front of the other and step in the water. Unless we are willing to step out on faith and get our feet wet, we are not likely to make much progress in those cross-over times of life. So the priest followed in obedience, step by step, the river waters disappeared and they were walking on dry ground.

Earlier in the parting of the Red Sea, (Exodus 14 & 15) when Moses lifted his rod the water begin to part. But when Israel crossed the Jordan River, it was not the obedient arm of the leader that brought the miracle but the obedient feet of the people. Most of us are not risk takers, we are people that are comfortable with our padded pews and predictability in serving the Lord. We don't like it much when we are facing those defining moments, we God asks us to cross over. We as humans like to hold on to the familiar, God wants us to be people who are willing to grow and expand, and claim new territory.

There are a lot of crossover times in life. Along with hope and joy there are also problems, problems that we do simply have neither the strength nor the wisdom to meet.

Some create an artificial crossover out of age. We think that at some magical age we will be more alive than we are today. You will never be more alive in this life than we are at this moment. Don't get locked in by your age.

Disease and sickness can be very dramatic crossover times. It can be a new frightening pathway. But nothing is new to God. God has promised to never leave us or abandon us. As David stated thousands of years ago, *“Moreover when I walk though the valley of deep shadows my Shepherd is with me.”* (Ps 23).

The most life-changing crossover is the moment we make the spiritual decision to open our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ; to recognize the destructiveness of our lives and to turn to him and receive his forgiveness.

Death is the ultimate crossover moment. Death is the final cross-over moment. The apostle Paul called it the last great enemy. But the reality is that Christ has promised us that he has taken the sting out of death. The victory is his. Christ walks through even *“that”* Jordan with us.

Remember as we stand to face our crossover moments whatever they may be, as we are confronted and challenged with what is frightening but also thrilling in terms of opportunity.

The end result of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River was that God was magnified; Joshua was exalted (v. 5), the people were energized and motivated, and the people of Canaan were terrorized (1:9).