

01-21-18 Crossing Jordan Joshua 3 & 4

A pig and a chicken were walking by a church where a gala charity event was taking place. Getting caught up in the spirit, the pig suggested to the chicken that they each make a contribution.

"Great idea!" the chicken cried. "Let's offer them ham and eggs?"

"Not so fast," said the pig. "For you, that's a contribution. For me, it's a total commitment."

What is God actually asking of each of us? A contribution or a total commitment? We're going to continue looking at the life of Joshua and learn about total commitment. We will be looking at Joshua 3 and 4, but we'll read it in pieces.

Background:

Our text takes place about 1450 BC or about 3500 years ago. Israel was camped on the East side of the Jordan waiting for the go-ahead to enter the land of Canaan and subdue it. Really? There were about 2 million people waiting to inherit the land on the other side. Didn't anyone look at this raging river between them and the Promised Land? Crossing this would be their first challenge and seemingly impossible.

Joshua sent out two spies, as we heard about last week, to report back about Jericho, the first city they would have to conquer. We heard how Rahab tipped them off about the fear of all the people because they heard what God had done at the Red Sea. They knew they were waiting to come in and conquer Jericho, and they were afraid. God kept telling Joshua not to be afraid, meanwhile the enemy was totally afraid. God gave Israel victory over two kings, Og and Sihon, and the people knew about that too. They were in a panic. This gave Israel confidence in God. This could be translated – FAITH in God.

At this time of year (April), the Jordan was at maximum flow in width and depth, much more than normal. They would have to move out in faith when the time came, but how?

Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God.
(Jim Elliot – Through Gates of Splendor)

This is exactly what the Israelites had to do including and especially their leader, Joshua.

Josh. 3:1-5 (MSG) - Joshua was up early and on his way from Shittim with all the People of Israel with him. He arrived at the Jordan and camped before crossing over. After three days, leaders went through the camp and gave out orders to the people: "When you see the Covenant-Chest of God, your God, carried by the Levitical priests, start moving. Follow it. Make sure you keep a proper distance between you and it, about half a mile—be sure now to keep your distance!—and you'll see clearly the route to take. You've never been on this road before."
Then Joshua addressed the people: "Sanctify yourselves. Tomorrow God will work miracle-wonders among you."

After three days, the officers went through the camp stirring up the people (about 2 million). They said to watch for the Ark (representing the presence of God among them). They were to keep their eyes on the Ark or on God. We also are to keep our eyes on God no matter what the task before us or the situation we find ourselves. God has us there to work in our lives.

The Ark was mentioned eight times in chapter 3. It was a magnificent article and looked like this... <image of Ark>

Inside the Ark were the 10 Commandments given to Moses, the rod of Aaron that budded although dead, and a jar of Manna from the wilderness wandering. Pretty impressive, but not as impressive as the cherubim on the lid – the Mercy seat – where God would manifest His presence among His people, and to Moses personally. It was a Holy item for them.

The priests carrying the Ark were to go first into the Jordan River – that ominous water. You have to realize what these people were attempting. Even though they were priests, there was a great risk. What if you felt God was telling you, or worse yet, what if your governor was telling you, you needed to step up and carry the Ark into the raging Jordan River? Whether God or another leader, what would you think? You can see the situation before you. This was an impossible task with a really bad ending – naturally. As Pastor John mentioned last week, God calls us to things before we get the reassurance that it is all OK. We don't get the ticket to the train until we arrive at the door. We have to trust in faith that the ticket will be there – FAITH.

Josh. 3:6-8 (MSG) - Joshua instructed the priests, "Take up the Chest of the Covenant and step out before the people." So they took it up and processed before the people. God said to Joshua, "This very day I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel. They'll see for themselves that I'm with you in the same way that I was with Moses. You will command the priests who are carrying the Chest of the Covenant: 'When you come to the edge of the Jordan's waters, stand there on the river bank.'"

Firmness gives credibility to the other attributes. The gentle heart leads across obstacles only if it is also the strong heart. Crossing snowcapped Rockies, parched plains, untamed rivers (like the Jordan), scorching deserts means developing a strategy, suffering, and using defeats as course markers. No “wilting morning glories” need apply. (Tom Haggai – How the Best is Won).

The priests with the Ark, representing God’s presence, were to stand still in the brink of the water.

Josh. 3:9-13 (MSG) - Then Joshua addressed the People of Israel: “Attention! Listen to what God, your God, has to say. This is how you’ll know that God is alive among you—he will completely dispossess before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. Look at what’s before you: the Chest of the Covenant. Think of it—the Master of the entire earth is crossing the Jordan as you watch. Now take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from each tribe. When the soles of the feet of the priests carrying the Chest of God, Master of all the earth, touch the Jordan’s water, the flow of water will be stopped—the water coming from upstream will pile up in a heap.”

In both vs. 11 and vs. 13, I have underlined **“the Master of all the earth.”** This miracle demonstrates God’s power over nature. He doesn’t do this often, but it is recorded in Scripture on occasion how God has intervened in the natural course of things. Whether it is parting the Red Sea, or the Jordan River, or moving the sun (or time) backwards, He has stepped in when necessary to alter the course of events dependent on nature. After they cross over the Jordan, things will return to normal natural order.

Crossing Jordan:

Josh. 3:14-16 (MSG) - And that’s what happened. The people left their tents to cross the Jordan, led by the priests carrying the Chest of the Covenant. When the priests got to the Jordan and their feet touched the water at the edge (the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest), the flow of water stopped. It piled up in a heap—a long way off—at Adam, which is near Zarethan. The river went dry all the way down to the Arabah Sea (the Salt Sea). And the people crossed, facing Jericho.

So the priests took the Ark and stepped into the waters of the raging Jordan River. As they did, the waters stopped flowing from the city of Adam (about 16 miles north of them) down to where they were standing and beyond. There was a GREAT expanse where the millions of people were able to cross over to the other side of the River on dry land. It was almost like the parting of the Red Sea. People heard about such things and so did Jericho. Most of the original people were dead, but heard about that miraculous time of crossing the Red Sea on dry land. Joshua and Caleb were there and here now to reinforce God’s mighty hand for His people. He was there for them then and would be there for them now.

Josh. 3:17 (MSG) - *And there they stood; those priests carrying the Chest of the Covenant stood firmly planted on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground. Finally the whole nation was across the Jordan, and not one wet foot.*

<view map of land> Joshua Map 3

This is also the area of the Jordan where Jesus was baptized by John some 1500 years later. *“Israel’s crossing the Jordan also illustrates a Christian passing from the wilderness (carnal, self-life) into the Promised Land (dedicated, Spirit-filled life).”* This is the point of committing totally to Christ in your life. It marks ending self-effort and beginning a dedicated life for Jesus. However, it also begins a life of wrestling against the Devil and his wickedness, for Satan doesn’t want any Christian to live a life dedicated to God. You are a target, and so am I. None of us are exempt (pastor or leader or congregant). (p. 33).

Eph. 6:12 (KJV) - *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Eph. 6:12 (MSG) - *This is no afternoon athletic contest that we’ll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.*

“Between the two (self-life and Christ-life), rolls the mighty Jordan – a river of impossibility between living for self and living for God.” (p. 33).

God can take us, with our weaknesses and problems, and give us such victory that we become a blessing to others. That’s incredible!

John Newton, an English slave trader in Africa lived a derelict life, then he came to Christ. His life was so changed that God used him mightily. He wrote the famous hymn – Amazing Grace.

Israel needed a clear view of the Ark (the presence of God), so we too, need a clear view of God. Each of us are faced with difficulties on a regular basis. We can’t really see a way out most of the time, but God has the way out for us if we commit to Him and trust Him. *“Faith lets us see God in simple ways of life.”* (p. 34).

Josh. 4:1-3 (MSG) - *When the whole nation was finally across, God spoke to Joshua: “Select twelve men from the people, a man from each tribe, and tell them, ‘From right here, the middle of the Jordan where the feet of the priests are standing firm, take twelve stones. Carry them across with you and set them down in the place where you camp tonight.’”*

So let me summarize chapter four so we're not here all day...

All the people crossed over Jordan on dry ground (not unlike the Red Sea experience). God instructs Joshua to choose 12 men, one from each tribe of Israel, to pick up a large stone and bring it to the shore on the West side of Jordan, at Gilgal, where a monument would be erected using these stones. This was to be a memorial for the next generations, so all would know going forward what God had done for them in crossing Jordan on dry ground.

This was no narrow passageway, but rather a huge expanse that was dry for 2 million people and livestock to cross over.

Joshua then collected 12 stones and stacked them as a monument in the bed of the Jordan right where the priests stood with the Ark – upstream from the crossing place. Then Joshua crossed over and commanded the priests with the Ark to cross over to the West side of Jordan. The priests, carrying the Ark, were the first to enter the river and the last to come out. As soon as their feet touched ground on the other side, the waters were released and began to flow violently as before, overflowing the banks of the Jordan River.

“The purpose of a memorial is to perpetuate an idea and provide a future opportunity to instruct young generations about God’s power on behalf of His people. It’s good to have memorials – to look back and remember God’s power and blessings. In the N.T., Jesus gave the Lord’s Supper as a memorial for the church to remember and not to forget that Christ shed His blood for our sin.” (p. 35)

Josh. 4:14-16 (MSG) - God made Joshua great that day in the sight of all Israel. They were in awe of him just as they had been in awe of Moses all his life. God told Joshua, “Command the priests carrying the Chest of The Testimony to come up from the Jordan.”

God did a miracle in their midst that day. This would build and strengthen their faith for conquering the land of Canaan, starting with Jericho.
“This area of the Jordan River is where Jesus was baptized almost 1500 years later.” (p. 33).

Josh. 4:19 (MSG) - The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. They set up camp at The Gilgal (The Circle) to the east of Jericho. <display map again>

Gilgal became their headquarters. Jericho stood massive and fortified before them. This would be a monumental challenge. How could they ever overtake this city – not knowing that the people were already planning defeat from what they heard about our great God.

Raymond Brown writes of David's followers: *"Their duty at that moment was to obey the king's instructions and to trust his wisdom. It meant that they were going into a life of hardship, insecurity, privation, suffering, and possibly death, but they would be with the king, and that was enough."* (Raymond Brown – Skillful Hands: Studies in the Life of David).

The people were commanded to select a lamb to sacrifice for the Passover on the 14th of that month. Timing is always important with God. Everything and every time has meaning in Scripture and in our lives. 1500 years later, on the 14th day of this month, Jesus would become our Passover Lamb as He died on that Cross on Calvary for our sins. *"God planned for Israel to cross the Jordan River at exactly that time."* (Amazing). (p. 36).

I have been in this church going on 29 years this April. I am kind of a control freak and a perfectionist (as many of you know). These may sound like good qualities, but they have their downside. These "qualities" have helped me to do some good things here, but they have also cost me in hurting some relationships as well. Both of these traits are a reflection on my pride – which is a bad thing in God's eyes and probably in your eyes as well. Perfectionism and control puts all the focus on ME rather than on God. There are times where we can't control the events of our lives, and things will never be perfect.

How much commitment are you giving to God? I am still growing in this area. It's a tough victory for me, and it must be for many of you as well. So, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to just accept defeat, or are you going to give God what He requires of you? He commands a total commitment – something we Nazarene's call entire sanctification. That is not just committing an area to God, but to commit all areas of your life to God. I am not there yet, but I'm working on it. How about you? Are you willing today to make one more step toward total commitment to God? It's a process – a life-long process.

Israel had to learn vital lessons while they waited at Gilgal. *"To wait to receive instructions and direction from God is what every Christian finds to be the hardest thing to do."* (p. 37).