

Promised Land
Crossing the Jordan
Sunday, January 15th, 2023

Welcome:

Psalm 100

Have you ever noticed when your hopes are at their highest for something to come about, you soon find yourself face to face with big challenges to overcome and problems to work through. It seems these go hand in hand. Hope rises with opportunity ahead of us, but in order to take hold of that opportunity, there are almost always challenges and obstacles in our path we have to go through.

Why can't it just be smooth sailing-just a simple flat road with no bumps, no forks, no sudden curves, no steep hills...just nice and flat and straight ahead as we march into the promised land?
The truth is-life is hardly ever like that is it?

The promise is spoken. The vision of that promise is given. The opportunity of blessing lies ahead, but there are some mighty obstacles set in your path you must first endure. **These are faith building moments.** Been there? *Are you there now?* Can you see that next opportunity God said He would give to you, that blessing He promised? Or is that view currently blocked by a big obstacle in your path?

We have a choice to make. Do we just try to plow through every obstacle we face and force our way through-hoping we make it without too many scars? Do we stop all movement forward, letting fear tell us that obstacle is too big for us to get around so we better not try? Or do we come to Almighty God and ask Him to show us what He wants to do to help us receive the blessing and promise He has surely given us?

Probably far too many times we choose option 1 or 2. Neither will bring us victory. Neither is what God tells us to do. So let's position in our hearts today that we will choose to seek God and invite Him to lead us through every obstacle **because we know** He is able to do all that we cannot. He is faithful to bring us to victory and if He has spoken it, He will surely do it. **This is a choice we all have-to first believe,** and then step out in faithful obedience to walk through, around, over, and under every obstacle in our path at God's leading.

This is where the Israelites were at. We heard how God told them to get ready. We heard how Joshua sent out men to look over the land so they knew what they would be up against and to encourage them by hearing affirmation of God's certain victory for them. Now the time had come where God was telling them to cross the mighty Jordan River. A mighty obstacle was in their path to taking hold of the promised land. Let's see what they were called to do and how God responded to their obedience.

Joshua 3: 2-5, 9-17 NIV

² **After three days** the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and **follow it.**" ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it." ⁵ Joshua told the people, "**Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.**"

⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ **This is how you will know that the living God is among you** and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹ **See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.** ¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.” ¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. **Yet as soon as the priests** who carried the ark reached the Jordan and **their feet touched the water’s edge,** ¹⁶ **the water from upstream stopped flowing.** It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while **all Israel passed by** until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Crossing the Jordan River was going to be the first of many courageous acts the Israelites would need to do, by faith, in order to take hold of the land God promised them. Their battle was about to begin with the forces of nature, even before their battles would begin with other men. This was no little creek they had to wade through. This was a wide, mighty, and flooding river. For us in this area, think of the deepest parts of the WI River when it’s swelling and the current is strong. Now imagine having to step into those waters as a whole group of people needing to cross over.

Do you think they might have had some fear rising within to think about trying to cross that flooding river? Maybe some of the strongest could swim it, but could everyone really get across? Would some drown in the process? Would God really protect them as He said? Why did God wait till this time of year when the waters were especially high? Why not wait until a timing of year the waters recede? Do you ever question God’s timing when He says “now”? Fear, doubt, frustration might have been rising within the people of Israel. Have you been there? God shows you something good He has in store for you; He tells you it is yours, and then He leads you to the edge of a raging river and says, but first you will have to cross this. But don’t worry because I am with you.

Well what is the first thing you are likely to do? Worry and start contemplating all that could go wrong and begin to let fear creep in. So in God’s infinite wisdom, He often gives us time to process our thoughts and feelings before we proceed. We must do this, **and we must learn to do so with the Holy Spirit and according to His Truth**, so that we process with divine wisdom and not just our fleshly emotions.

- **Process.**

Joshua 3:2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp,

If you remember from last week, Joshua told the men get ready because in 3 days we will cross the Jordan River. So when the 3 days had passed, the officers gave the orders to move and follow the ark of the covenant—which would be leading them directly into the middle of the river.

Why 3 days? Well in three days one can truly process what is happening in their heart and allow the Spirit of God to shine truth and light into fear and confusion.

Numbers have significance in Biblical times and the number 3 often signifies completeness-which shouldn't surprise us since the Trinity is made up of 3 beings who are all joined as one. Together they are complete and in perfect harmony. In Hebrew **the number 3 means harmony, new life, and completeness.**

In this time of waiting 3 days, seeking God and pondering this situation with Him, the people of Israel could be brought into harmony with God and one another, and perceive this new life they were being given as they obeyed God and crossed the Jordan.

They could work through reacting in their emotions and purpose to respond in obedience. **When we act out of obedience, our feelings then follow our obedience.** Our feelings transform into ones born out of faith vs. fear.

We can process with God by inviting the Holy Spirit to cleanse and guide our thoughts with what is true and rejecting all that is not of God's truth.

2 Corinthians 10:5 NKJV ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

God gave the Israelites time to process what lie before them. You and I are wise to do the same when God brings us to a mighty river with rushing waters. Let us not jump right in. Let us pause and process with God what we are feeling in our fleshly nature and invite the Spirit to infuse us with truth and God's perspective on the situation. Then we see God tells Joshua, who instructs the Israelites, **to follow the ark of the covenant.** When you see it moving, you are also to move and follow.

- **Follow.**

The ark of the covenant symbolized the presence of God. Wherever it was, the people would know God's presence was there among them, or in this case, went before them.

Joshua 3:3 "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, **you are to move out from your positions and follow it.**

Why was this so important to follow where the ark was?

Joshua 3:4 ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.

The ark, the presence of God, showed the Israelites the way to go in uncharted territory. God's presence, His Holy Spirit and His Word all show us the way to go and we are to follow.

When the people of God obediently followed when God told them to move and listened to His instruction, they were safe from all danger. He led them safely out of Egypt; He kept them safe as He navigated them through the desert, and now He would supernaturally provide safe passage through this mighty river, as they followed.

They would not be able to accomplish this feat in their own strength. None of us could stop a raging river and hold the waters back in our own power; *and that is exactly the point.* God chose that precise time when the waters were at their highest and most forceful, to say, **trust in Me.** Trust in My mighty power. As you do, I will display to all that I AM God and all will know I am for you, My chosen ones and no one will be able to stand against you.

2 Corinthians 3: 4-5 says ⁴Such confidence we have through Christ before God. ⁵Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but **our competence comes from God.**

Their competence to cross that river came through God's power, not their own.

Can you see how God lines things up in your life too, so you must turn to Him and let Him display His awesome power to provide, rescue and bring you to safe passage? So that you can't say, look what I have done, but that you must glorify God Almighty!

He is looking to greatly bless those who place their hope in Him and follow where He leads because they have surrendered their hearts to Him and see Him truly as their Lord.

John 8: 31-32 NKJV ³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.** ³²And you shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free.**"

This freedom Jesus is talking about is the promised land we are called to take hold of. It is a place we dwell in free from bondage to fear, anger and bitterness, rejection, hopelessness, unforgiveness, addictions that bind and destroy us, heavy burdens that weigh us down, and darkness that overwhelms us.

All of this has already been given to us, at the cross. It is finished. The question for each of us to ponder with God, is "*do I believe it has been given to me?*"

The answer to that truth is found in Jesus and learning to abide in Him. He is truth, and the more we come to know Truth, abide in Truth, the more Truth sets us free from the shackles of this world. We must learn to know the voice of Jesus and how to tune to Him above every other voice.

John 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and **they follow me.**

The ark was there before the Israelites as a remembrance of all that was spoken beginning with Abraham, then through Moses and again through Joshua, The ark symbolized every word and promise. As they looked to the ark, they could see the promises of God before them and they could step into that riverbed by faith.

We have to do the same as we are called to step into raging waters in our life. We remember God's promises and we fix our gaze upon Jesus and all He is. We see Him fulfilling those promises with every step we take, our feet will follow where our gaze is. **We follow where He leads us, not based on our feelings over the situation but in obedience to who He is and what He has promised.**

But let us also be mindful as we position our hearts to be obedient to God, we must also regularly cleanse our hearts so they are pure before God. This allows us to be vessels for His mighty power to flow through.

- **Sanctify.**

Joshua called the people of Israel to consecrate themselves. This is what we call sanctification.

Joshua 3:5 Joshua told the people, "**Consecrate yourselves,** for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

For Israel that meant to wash themselves and their clothes and to set aside all fleshly desires for that period of time-intimacy with their spouses-set yourself apart and prepare your heart. This was a requirement before God would do the miraculous act of stopping the waters. As we discussed at the start

of this chapter, God didn't tell Joshua to physically train up his men or sharpen the swords as they prepared for battle. He told Joshua to meditate on the Law—which to you and I is the Word of God, *day and night so it was sealed in his heart*.

God didn't tell the men of Israel to get their weapons ready for battle; *He told them to consecrate themselves; to prepare spiritually* for the mighty thing that was about to take place. Everything that was about to take place would be based on their faith in God. He wanted and needed their hearts pure so their sin was not a hindrance to His power at work in and through them.

God calls us to do the same. We are called to *live set apart from the ways of the world*, to purify our hearts before Him, *to quickly repent of sin as we become aware of it*, and to invite His Spirit to cleanse us in every way. We are to dedicate our hearts to Him.

Romans 12: 1-2 NLT teaches us, And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to **give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice**—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ²Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but **let God transform you** into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

We invite God into our hearts to sanctify them. We ask Him what He wants us to be doing in that situation, how He wants us to cross that river. We invite Him to guide our steps and to help us be obedient to His path and timing. We ask Him to align our choices with His direction. We purpose in our heart to not let our emotions direct us, but we look for the ark, His presence, and we follow.

We can pray this: **Psalm 51:10** NKJV Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. My prayer for all of us as we are standing on the edge of a raging river, is that we tune to the Holy Spirit and invite Him to move freely in us and sanctify us.

Ephesians 3:16 NLT ¹⁶I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. As we come to seemingly impossible situations in life, let us expect God to not only show up, but to work miracles in our favor and to His glory and praise!

Through the obedience of Joshua and the Israelites who followed his lead, God was magnified by doing the miraculous so they could all cross the riverbed on dry ground; Joshua was exalted in the eyes of Israelites as their chosen leader, the Israelites were energized and filled with hope and the Canaanites who heard of this supernatural event were filled with terror at the coming of this people into their land.

Conclusion: When we are called to cross our *Jordan River*, may we seek the Holy Spirit to help us process our thoughts and prepare our hearts. May we choose obedience over our feelings and follow where we see the presence of God. May we continuously confess our sin to remove all barriers that hinder God's power at work in our lives.

Let's pray:

Final Blessing: 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-24 ²³May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

