

When the River Runs Dry

(Joshua 3-4)

3/1/17; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Whitmire is a town surrounded by a lot of water..

The Enoree River runs on the east side of town.

The Tiger is only 8 miles north of town, and the Broad River is only 15 miles to the northeast of town...

We also have a number of creeks that come close to town..

Indian Creek is only a few miles south of town and Duncan Creek starts of the west side of town and passes almost through the center of town on the south side.

Now, Duncan has a unique feature on the west side of town.

Long ago, someone built a ford on the creek that is wide enough for a car to drive across the creek..

I remember going there as a kid and seeing my dad drive him truck across the creek on this raised piece of concrete in the middle of Duncan Creek...

It was absolutely amazing to me, but that is an old way or crossing a body of water without having to build a bridge...

You just built a high place that allows you to cross deep water but doesn't act as a dam but lets shadow water pass over it...

With that in mind, we come to the book of Joshua and find ourselves with Israel on the east side of the Jordan River, but we know God has told us to cross the Jordan River..

However, there's no bridge to cross...

There's no ford to cross..

And worse yet, it is harvest season when the Jordan River is at its highest and widest with the swiftest current...

So, what's the plan...

Well, if its 1405 BC and God is going with you, its really not a problem...

You simply let God create you a path right through it...

Besides, 40 years ago, he made walls of water out of the Red Sea for you to walk through..

And this is much easier since He only has to stop the upriver side and let the down river side flow away...

So if you are Israel and you need to a million people across a body of water, you dont need a bridge, a boat or a ford, you only need the Lord..

So, tonight we are going to look at Joshua 3 and Joshua 4 as Israel moves into the Promised Land by going through the Jordan River...

And in the process of watching them cross the river, we learn more about Israel's God, who is also our God in 2017...

He hasn't changed, and though we don't may not need help crossing a river, we still have a God who is powerful enough to do what he pleases...

So. let's learn about and worship some incredible qualities and characteristics of our God tonight...

Here is the outline that will carry us through Joshua 3-4...

I. God Leads and We Follow (3:1-6)

Let's begin by reading the first 6 verses of Joshua 3...

3 Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they lodged there before they crossed. 2 At the end of three days the officers went through the midst of the camp; 3 and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. 4 However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 [a]cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." 5 Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." 6 And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people.

Here is a map to remind us of where we are at in the world..

Israel has come up on the east side of the Dead Sea.

The land that God has promised to give them lies on the western side of the Jordan River..

Moses, who has led them for years is dead, but God's plan carry on and now it is time for Joshua to take Moses place and lead Israel across the Jordan..

Verse 1 tells us that Joshua got up early along with the rest of Israel and they left Shittim and came to the edge of the Jordan River...

And then Joshua sent his officer through the camp of Israel and told everyone to be on the lookout for the ark of the covenant being carried by the priests..

Now, we need to remind ourselves of what this ark is...

It was simply a golden box made to the specifications that God gave Israel..

And it symbolized the presence of God with the people of Israel...

The priests were charged with carrying the ark and it often went before the people symbolizing God's leading the nation...

Well, the same will be true as Israel crosses over the Jordan to enter the Promised Land...

The ark will go before the people...

In fact, it will be at 2000 cubits or about 1000 yards before the people as they enter the land...

And it served as a GPS for the people as they walked into the Promised Land...

Clearly, it was a holy possession of God, and wasn't to be approached but here, it went first to lead the way...

When Johnny and I go walking through the woods, I lead the way...

First of all to protect him or see and dangers that he can't see or understand but also to take on the thorns and scrapes that the person in front gets...

God led the way for His people into the promised land; they were simply called to follow..

But on top of that, Joshua commanded Israel to consecrate themselves before they set out behind the ark...

This would suggest the idea of repenting of known sins...

Maybe a ceremonial cleanings of their lives..

Possibly abstaining from sexual activity in marriage..

And all of this would serve to set Israel's focus as they entered into a hostile land...

So, all the preparation have been made, and now it is time to get moving...

Before we do, I want to point out an important relationship we see in these first 6 verses of Joshua 3, and it is this....

How do we balance the truth of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility...

In other words, if God is in control, what do I really need to do?

And people mess up this relationship all the time...

Some put man above God and make man the center of everything that happens in the world...

Others take the responsibility of man and toss it out the window and say that whatever happens will happen..

Yet, we see how this relationship is described right here in Joshua 3...

On one hand, God is leading Israel into the promised land...

He is out front. He won't be stopped.

Israel is getting the land that God promised to them, regardless of what the inhabitants of the land think...

In a sense, the battle for the land is over before it starts...

Yet, what do we also see here?

Joshua is telling the people to get up and get ready to take the land...

Joshua is telling them to consecrate themselves and be ready to cross the Jordan..

In one sense, God is going to do what God does...

In another sense, we have a responsibility to follow the Lord's leading...

The truth of Joshua 3 is this...

God is in control, but don't be left out by doing nothing...

God leads, but we follow...

The second truth is found in verses 7-13...

II. God Appoints and He Confirms (3:7-13)

A major emphasis of the opening verses of the book of Joshua is one the man named Joshua...

He is a rookie at leading the people...

Though God chose him and Moses blessed his leadership, Joshua still had to prove himself to the people...

Yet, God appoints and then affirms....

Verse 7...

7 Now the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. 8 You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ***9 Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the Lord your God."*** ***10 Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite. 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the***

Jordan. 12 Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe. 13 It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are [b]flowing down from above [c]will stand in one heap.”

Leaders lead, and Joshua begins to establish his leadership over the people in verse 7...

And good leadership always starts with the word of God...

First, leaders listen to the word of God...

In verse 8, God tells Joshua that he is to command the priests what to do when they enter the water carrying the ark of the covenant...

And though it may sound like a strange request, leaders don't question the word of God, they believe and obey it..

Leaders also communicate to their people by pointing them to the promises of God...

Joshua called the people together and reassured them that they would enter the land and God would

give them the land that belonged to the people who lived there..

And then leaders clearly lay out the plan for the people...

Joshua tells the people to follow the ark, pick out a man from each tribe, and then watch as God stops the water in the Jordan River from flowing while they crossed...

Now, we move from being on the edge of the Jordan to moving across the the Jordan River in verses 14-7...

Where we see a third truth about the Lord...

III. God Promises and He Proves (3:14-17)

Verse 14...

14 So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, 15 and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), 16 the waters which were [d]flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were [e]flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. 17 And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

Now, let me show you a few pictures of the Jordan River today...

The first picture is near the area around Jericho, and the level of the river is a little below normal...

The second picture is a little north of Jericho as the driver is a little above normal as the harvest season approaches..

The third picture is a picture from above as the river is at normal level...

And the last picture is taken as the river has overflowed its banks..

As you can see, the whole size of the river is more than doubled as the water rises...

Not only is it deeper and more current, it is much wider and top of that, there are bushes and trees all submerged in it..

Now the question is why would God command the crossing of it during the worst possible time to cross it..

Why not wait until the waters go down in a few months and it becomes nothing more than a creek?

Why ask Israel to cross it at the worst possible time?

I think you know the answer to that...

So God is most glorified when they get across...

Why does God call a man who stutters like Moses to be a preacher to Israel?

Because he is most glorified...

Why does God call a Christian killer like Paul to be a Christian preacher?

Because God is most glorified when it works..

Why does God call you to do things that are outside of your comfort zone?

Because when it happens, God is most glorified...

If you need to cross a river, let's do it when it is at his highest point...

That way, the only thing to say is that it only would have been possible with the help of the Lord..

So, Israel is entering the river when it makes the least sense to do it...

But when God leads, we follow....

And that is simply because we know that as God promises, he also provides a way and proves his faithfulness..

I also want to point out one more thing here that is interesting to me...

Notice in verse 17 that twice it mentions the fact that the Jordan riverbed was dry...

Not only were the priests standing firm on dry ground, but the people crossed on dry ground....

It should also be noted that is what is also says in relation to the Red Sea parting...

The nation walked through the Red Sea on dry ground...

Why is that important?

Think about this...

Even if the water is walled up, the ground would still be damp and wet and muddy...

Even if the people weren't crossing through the water, they could still sink up to their knees from the mud that would remain...

But remember this, God is a God of miracles...

Even if the water stopped flowing because something that happened upstream, the river would still be muddy for days, weeks, and even months later...

Yet, Israel enjoyed the blessing of a dry river bottom...

You have to keep your feet dry when you travel...

Wet and damp feet lead to disease and injuries..

And those things spread quickly through a nation that lives so close together....

God is good to stop the water, but God is great to make it dry...

That is how much God cares for His people...

He not only gives us food every day, He gives us food that tastes good....

He not puts on a planet, he puts on a planet that is beautiful...

God not only provides for us, he provides for us in good and outstanding ways...

Let's leave chapter 3 and finish up this river crossing and entry into the Promised Land in chapter 14...

I've entitled the first 13 verses of this chapter....

IV. God Rules and We Remember (4:1-13)

Verse 1....

Now when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, 2 “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, 3 and command them, saying, ‘Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.’” 4 So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe; 5 and Joshua said to them, “[a]Cross again to the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. 6 [b]Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask [c]later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ 7 then you shall say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.”

8 Thus the sons of Israel did as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the Lord spoke to Joshua, ac-

according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place and put them down there. 9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day. 10 For the priests who carried the ark were standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed 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; 11 and when all the people had finished crossing, the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed before the people. 12 The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over in battle array before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them; 13 about 40,000 equipped for war, crossed for battle before the Lord to the desert plains of Jericho.

In chapter 14, we see something very common in the history of Israel...

And that is the setting up of a memorial to the Lord...

This time the memorial will be made out of stones of the Jordan River..

And this time, there will be two memorials...

The 12 men will pick up 12 stones to build a memorial on the west side of the river...

And Joshua set up 12 stones in the middle of the river...

The 12 stones in the middle of the river were a memorial to the priests who stood in the river while the nation crossed over to the other side...

And the 12 stones on the western side of the river were a memorial to God cutting off the flow of the river and allowing the nation to cross on dry ground...

Now, the question is....

Why did God command Israel to build memorials?

The answer is two fold...

The primary reason is the memorials served to remind Israel of God's goodness...

Today, we take pictures that help us remember events..

Or we keep journals....

Or we buy keepsakes...

Israel built altars or rock pyramids....

And the reason is simple...

We have short memories as people...

Ever had your money run low and watch as God always provides enough to get through it...

Then ever had run low again and wonder if this is the end?

Why does that happen?

Well our memory of God's goodness is overcome by our unbelieving flesh...

God knows this about us, and so he asks us to remind ourselves of his faithfulness...

Today, we have the Scriptures to remind us of his faithfulness...

We have the testimony of our lives to remind us of his faithfulness...

We have the fellowship of other people at church to remind us of his faithfulness..

Well, Israel had these memorials scattered all over the Middle East to remind us of God's faithfulness...

But there is a secondary reason as well...

We see it spelled out here in verse 6...

These memorials are a great teaching aid to the next generation...

Joshua tells the people to set up the stones and then when their children ask, 'what do these stones mean,' they can use them as a lesson on God's faithfulness, power, and goodness..

Israel understood and excelled at the need to teach the next generation of God's glory...

The passover was designed to help Israel remember God's deliverance, but it was also a fun event for the kids...

The same with the festival of booths, where the kids could build a stick house for their family to live in for a week...

And all of these festivals and memorials were designed with kids in mind...

To stimulate their curiosity and cause them to ask questions...

Listen to me...

Dont assume that one day your kids are going to magically pick up the Bible and start reading and become a super Christian....

Use the everyday faithfulness of God in your life t teach the next generation...

Tell your kids how God provides...

Show them...

Pray big with them...

Let them see your weaknesses to always have faith...

Show them your struggles, but then show them God's ability to meet your needs...

I get so put off with these churches that spend thousands of dollars entraining kids...

Look, there is nothing wrong with doing those things, but do you know the most impactful thing on a kid's life is to see the impact that God makes on your life....

Israel set up stones on the banks of the Jordan, and when a kid wandered up and wanted to play on them...

It was a perfect opportunity to teach about the faithfulness of God.

When God makes a way, we are called to remember and teach to the next generation...

One final truth to see in Joshua 3-4...

V. God Starts and He Finishes (4:14-24)

Verse 14....

14 On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; so that they [d]revered him, just as they had [e]revered Moses all the days of his life.

15 Now the Lord said to [f]Joshua, 16 “Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan.” 17 So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, “Come up from the Jordan.” 18 It came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were [g]lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before.

19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. 20 [h]Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. 21 He said to the sons of [i]Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ 22 then you shall inform your children, saying, ‘Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.’ 23 For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the [j]Red Sea, which

***He dried up before us until we had crossed;
24 that all the peoples of the earth may know that
the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may
[k]fear the Lord your God [l]forever.”***

People are so inconsistent...

It comes from our fallen nature...

We start something, and we rarely finish....

We start a diet and fizzle out...

We start exercising and give up...

WE start a project at home and it ends up collecting dust...

Yet, this is not true of God...

What he starts, he finishes, and he finishes perfect...

In these final verses of chapter 4, look at how God finished what he started....

First, he told Joshua that in chapter 3, verse 7, that he would use Joshua's leadership at the river crossing to earn his respect from all of Israel..

And what did we read in chapter 4, verse 14...

Joshua was revered by Israel in the same way that Israel revered Moses..

What else did God finish here?

Well, he finished the obvious...

He got the entire nation to the other side of the Jordan with dry feet as a bonus...

Where God promises, he proves his faithfulness...

There is one other thing to see here that is most interesting....

Look at verse 19...

When did Israel arrive in the Promised Land?

On the 10th of their first month...

Do you know what else happened on the tenth day of their first month?

Exodus 12:1-3...

Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of [a]Egypt, 2 “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak to all the congregation of Is-

rael, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a [b]lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a [c]lamb for [d]each household.

In other words, as Israel prepared to leave Egypt, God told them to pick out the lamb, whose blood would serve to protect them from the angel of death in the final plague...

This Lamb’s blood would provide their exodus from Egypt to head to the Promised Land...

And now on the same date 40 years later, Israel has made it to the Promised Land...

God had begun their deliverance on the tenth of the first month, and he finished their deliverance on the tenth of the first month...

How great is our God!

What he starts, he finishes....

Philippians 1:6...

6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

I am grateful that what God began in me, he will finish in me...

I am glad that I don't have to hold on to my salvation or I'd lose it...

When God truly saves, He truly keeps to the end...

And the all the church said "Amen."

Conclusion

Here are a couple closing thoughts...

#1- When our eyes sees impossible, God sees opportunity.

Just when you think it is as bad as it can get, God thinks it is great time to trust His goodness...

The darkest of nights turn into the brightest of dawns when we trust the Lord and don't use our own ideas to cross the river...

Proverbs 3:5-6...

5

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.***

6

***In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.***

#2 - What our minds tend to forget, God wants us to remember.

I have found that the greatest thing to increase my dependence and trust in the Lord is to look at what HE has done rather than wonder what HE will do..

Though we can't walk straight by looking behind us, we can stand still and look backwards..

And sometimes when I don't know what will happen tomorrow...

I simply stand still and look back on what God has done...

There were going to be more times of uncertainty in Israel's future...

And in those days when they don't see the future that was coming...

They simply needed to remember the God of their past...

Sometimes, we just need to reflect upon the goodness of God yesterday to get out of bed today...

Let us pray...