

Text: Joshua 3:1-17

Title: “How a Millions of People Crossed a Flooding River”

INTRODUCTION

Church, we’ve been talking about how God works miraculously among a group of people. The purpose is to raise our faith in God.

Romans 10:17 (NASB95) - So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

There’s something about the Word of God that quickens faith within us. I tell you there are times when I’m overwhelmed or confused or frustrated, and I get in the Word of God, and my faith is quickened.

This morning I want to read God’s Word, and let’s let it quicken our hearts. It’s one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. My faith is inspired every time I read and tell this story.

Let’s turn into the OT and to Joshua 3:1. At this point in the OT Israel has been miraculously delivered from the bondage of Egypt. With the Egyptian in hot pursuit, God parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they could pass through. Those same waters then swallowed up the entire Egyptian army. Then Israel entered the wilderness where God miraculously guided them and provided for them. But His plan was for them not just to be saved *from* something (Egypt), but *for* something (the Promised Land of Canaan). So God was now ready to take His people, who now may have numbered around 2 million, over into the Promised Land, the land He had promised hundreds of years before to give to their ancestor Abraham. Now the promise would come true. But it would not be easy.

Joshua 3:1-4 (NIV) - Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. 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 priests, who are Levites, 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 a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.”

Now Joshua is the leader, and he’s one of the most inspiring leaders in the Bible. But this will be a great challenge for him. We’re told later in the details that the Jordan River, mentioned here in v.1 was flooding out of its banks. How would they get across a raging river?

But believing that God would somehow make it possible, he moved them all, bag and baggage, the seven miles from Shittim . . . to the Jordan.

And it says that once they arrived at the river it says that they stopped for three days. Why? Maybe it would take them that long to get organized. But I believe the delay was for another reason. Sometimes God orchestrates delays for His purposes.

You see I believe that the delay also gave everyone an opportunity to get close and see the river ... the powerful current that came from the melting of the winter snows of Mount Hermon in the north. For three days that looked at that obstacle, that barrier, and thought, “No way!”

At then at end of the third day of waiting the people were given instructions that didn’t seem to make much sense. No army scouts would advance first into the land but rather priests bearing the ark would lead the way.

Now this Ark of the Covenant is very important. It was the special chest that symbolized the very presence of God Himself. God Himself would lead His people through this great challenge.

With the ark going ahead the people were to fall in behind, or possibly to spread around it on three sides. But they were to keep their distance by some 3,000 feet. Why? Two reasons:

- The Ark represented the presence of Almighty God, so they were not to casually crowd around it, but to reverently respect it.
- The Ark was the presence of God guiding the people. Everyone needed to be able to see the ark. If people crowded around, it would be lost in the crowds, and confusion would ensue.

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

So here’s the first thing if we are to see God do amazing things in our lives as His people. We must ...

1. KEEP FOLLOWING THE DIRECTION OF GOD.

Today God still leads His people. We no longer have the Ark of the Covenant. Now we have the very Word of God and the Spirit of God to guide us. And if you will allow God the time ... if you will listen ... He will lead.

Now what we tend to do is to take matters into our own hands. We lean on our own understanding. I’m sure there were people in the crowd that day who thought, “This is nuts! We’ll all drown. There’s got to be another way.

Yes, a matter of fact there is another way, but it is not God’s way. And we’ll always get into trouble if we try to do it our own way and not follow God’s direction.

There were others in the crowd that day who, staring at that raging river, must have thought, “How am I going to get through this?”

Joshua: “How am I going to get 2 million people through this?” The priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant: “How are we all going to get through this?” The people: “How am *I* going to get through this?”

Have you ever asked that questions, staring at a perilous, seemingly impossible situation, “How will I get through this?” A serious illness ... “How will I get through this?” Bankruptcy ... “How will I get through this?” A financial challenge ... “How will I get through this?” A single mom with a sick child ... “How will I get through this?” A severe temptation ... “How in the world will I get through this?”

Let’s read on...

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

There are times when God’s plan to is prepare physically. Sharpen your swords, tighten your belts; we’re going into battle. But this time, that is not what God tells them to do. Joshua doesn’t tell them to put on their life vests ... their floaties. He doesn’t tell them to prepare by building rafts or tying ropes around themselves or waterproofing their belongings. No, the preparation had nothing to do with the outside ... it everything to do with the inside. It wasn’t physical, it was spiritual.

Here’s the next thing we are to do if we are to be part of something amazing that God is doing...

2. PREPARE YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY FOR WHAT GOD WILL DO.

They were to consecrate themselves. What does that mean? In the Bible that word “consecrate” means to prepare something or someone to be used by God. For example: When God gave instructions for the building of the tabernacle and later the temple where His Name would be worshipped, everything and everyone associated with it were be consecrated.

It’s connected to the word “holiness.” Everything that is associated with God and His activity needs to be made holy. It is very much akin to the NT word “sanctified” ... to be set apart for God.

Practically speaking, how do I do that? I have found two ways are very important:

- Position – I must position myself to where I can hear from God. This means I get into the Word and I let the Word get into me. I’m listening for what God has to say through His Word and through other people. To heighten our sensitivity to the voice of God we might fast and pray to prepare ourselves.
- Purge – That is, I can’t expect to be in the middle of God’s powerful activity if I’m living part of my life outside of His will. Is there any sin that is unconfessed, or that has not been repented of and forsaken?

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

Do you see the expectancy and the faith there? “Tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.” God can do the impossible and the incredible. Have faith!

Imagine what would happen if we went to bed every night with Joshua 3:5 on our hearts. “Consecrate yourself, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things...”

Let’s read on...

Joshua 3:6-8 - Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them. ⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’ ”

Why in the world would Joshua have the priests carrying the Ark to go down and stand in the waters of the river? They were demonstrating faith that God would provide. They were moving forward with the expectation that God would provide.

Here’s the next thing. If we will be part of something amazing God is doing...

3. TAKE STEPS THAT DEMONSTRATE YOUR FAITH.

Friend, don’t run from your challenges. If God has given you a word, run toward your challenges.

ILLUSTRATION - There’s a great illustration of this in “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.” Indy is involved in a search for the Holy Grail. As the film reaches its climax, Indy must go through three tests in order to reach the Grail. After overcoming the first two obstacles, the final test would be a test of his faith in some instructions that his father had given him.

Indiana's father is shot just at the end of their quest. With his father dying, Indiana walks ahead, following an ancient book that gives clues to guide him. He comes to the brink of a chasm deeper than the eye can see. There is no visible way for him to cross the chasm.

Indiana is faced with the impossible. All he sees is the sheer cliff edge and the vast gulf beneath him. Then, as he studies his guidebook, his face relaxes in realization, and he says, "It's a leap of faith."

With his father whispering, "You must believe, boy, you must believe," Indiana looks straight ahead, gathers his courage, and slowly raises one foot into the empty air in front of him.

With a thud, his foot lands on solid ground. The camera pans to show Indiana standing on a narrow rock bridge, deceptively carved to match the exact outline of the ravine beneath it.

The bridge did not become visible until he took the “leap of faith.”

Let’s read on...

Joshua 3:9-11 - 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.

Here's the lesson:

4. TAKE ONE CHALLENGE AT A TIME.

“Lord, what about the Canaanites, Hittites and termites over there?” The Lord says, “I’m about to do something that will show you that I can handle any, and I mean any, obstacle before you.”

Oh how we get into these moods where we start buying worries ahead of time. “God what about this ... what about that?”

Let's read on...

Joshua 3:12-13 - 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.”

Now look at this carefully. This is the second time that Joshua has referred to the Lord as “the Lord of all the earth...” (see vv.11,13). Why is that? What were they facing? A raging river. The river is part of the earth, and the Lord is the Lord of all the earth.

Here's the lesson:

5. LET GOD DIRECT THE TRAFFIC.

God is all-powerful. He created this universe. And all the forces that are more powerful than us, are not as powerful as God.

Let's read on...

Joshua 3:14-16 - 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 (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

Now here's something really good: The miracle took place before the people actually started “a great distance away.” The miracle actually took place somewhere else before it took place before the people. God can orchestrate things everywhere to bring about His purposes. You never know what God is up to in places you don't even imagine are involved.

ILLUSTRATION – A friend of mine was telling me this week of something that happened to him while he was on a mission trip recently. He was on his way to the airport to return home. Just before getting to the airport he felt impressed of God to give his last cash away to a needy person. When he got to the airport, he suddenly realized that he had to pay about \$30 for a departure tax. He was suddenly gripped with fear. Then he started digging through his gear just by chance to see what he could scrape together. He unzipped a pocket of one of his bags, and inside was 50 one dollar bills. Where did that come from? Then it came back to him. Several days before for some reason, he had just stuffed those bills in that pocket to get them out of his pants pocket. Then he forgot about it. That's the way God works.

Now, church, stand in awe of the miracle!

Joshua 3:17 - 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 passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.