



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

7350 Granbury Rd.

Fort Worth, TX 76123

Joshua, Faith and Humility

Lesson #3

Joshua 3:1-17

Can you think back and remember a day you waited for a long time with great anticipation and excitement? Most of us can. As a child, Christmas and birthdays were such days. Later it may have been graduation day, your wedding day, or maybe earning the right to compete in some great competition like the Olympics.

Depending on the nature of the day and what it might hold, such a time might also bring about a certain amount of anxiety because of the challenge you might face. For months, weeks, and days you waited, and then finally, the day arrived. Can you imagine the anticipation and excitement the children of Israel faced as they stood before the River Jordan the evening before they were to cross over into the land?

The earlier generation had failed to enter because of unbelief and the new generation had waited a long time, for some it was close to forty years. Joshua and Caleb, who were now about eighty years old, had waited even longer. According to the promise to the Patriarchs, Jewish anticipation went back some five hundred years. But now, Joshua tells the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (3:5).

But if there was excitement, there must also have been some anxiety as they beheld the swollen river and thought about the fortified cities that lay on the other side. Life is like that. Often, with our hopes at their highest, there are accompanying challenges and problems that we face at the very same time.

After hearing a message at a Bible conference on how to cope with discouragement, three people greeted the speaker: a young mother who had not slept the previous night because her husband had come home at 10:30 p.m. and announced he was divorcing her; a pastor whose teenage daughter was rebelling against God; and a Christian worker whose husband had entered the hospital for treatment of a brain tumor.

Stated a pastor, “The trouble is that we are facing problems that we cannot solve: this customer I must sell, that exam I must take, this debt I must pay, those in-laws I must endure, that habit I must break, this marriage I must save.”¹⁶

But that is life in a fallen world. Along with our hopes and joys there are always problems for which we simply have neither the strength nor the wisdom to meet the challenge. We need strength from above. The battle is really the Lord’s and this is what Israel was being

taught in this chapter. Donald Campbell titles chapter 3, “Fording Uncrossable Rivers.”

The Preeminent Place of the Ark (vss. 1–4)

Aside from the miraculous way the river was crossed, the most important feature of this chapter is the Ark of the Covenant. Its prominence is stressed in the number of times it is mentioned in chapters 3 and 4 (nine times in chapter 3 and seven times in chapter 4) and by the nature of the commands and statements given in its regard.

What’s so important about the Ark? It represented the person and promises of God. It 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.

And such is the case with all of life. As Paul cried out when contemplating the challenges and trials of ministry, “And who is adequate for these things?” But he then answered his own question with these words: “And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (2 Cor. 3:4-5).

The People Consecrated (vss. 5-6)

In verse 5, Joshua commands the people to consecrate themselves in view of the wonders God would work among them on the next day. But what does the word “consecrate” mean? This is not exactly what we might expect from a military standpoint. Today, the military leader would have said, “Sharpen your swords and spears and

polish your shields!” But God’s ways are not our ways. For God’s people, spiritual preparation is the vital element for it is being rightly related to God that brings the power of God on our work and ministry.

“Consecrate” is the Hebrew qadash and it may mean, “be hallowed, set apart, consecrated” or “consecrate, set apart, prepare, dedicate.” But here it is in the hithpael stem which is reflexive and means, “consecrate yourselves, set yourselves apart, prepare yourselves.” This stem points out personal responsibility.

In the Old Testament this word is often used (particularly in Exodus and Leviticus) in connection with the Old Testament sacrifices, priesthood, washings, and with regard to the children of Israel as God’s people. In this regard, it was especially used in connection with confession or cleansing through the use of Old Testament sacrifices, washings, and offerings (Ex. 19:10, 22; 40:13). It portrays the need to deal with sin in the life. It was used of setting something apart for use by the Lord and His purposes in the sense of cleansing, preparing, and dedicating it to the Lord (e.g., consecration of Mt. Sinai) (Ex. 19:22); preparing Aaron via the priestly garments and anointing for ministry (Ex. 28:3, 41); and setting apart for God’s use through sacrifice, and anointing (Ex. 29:1, 36, 37; 29:44; 40:13).

Application: Note Joshua 3:5b, “for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” When there is a lack of consecration through confession for the defilement of sin along with a commitment to God’s purpose for our lives in service or ministry, we hinder the power of God. But there is more included here in this call for consecration. “The people of Israel were to expect God to work a miracle. They were to be eager, gripped by a sense of wonder. Israel was not to lose sight of their God who can do the incredible and the humanly impossible.”¹⁷

Two key ideas are involved here—Preparation and Dedication:

(1) It reminds us of God's holiness. God is absolute holiness, completely set apart from sin. He is a holy God who cannot have fellowship with sinful man or allow sin in His presence without a solution to the sin problem.

(2) It shows the necessity of sacrifice for sin or the cross of Christ. Without faith in the cross and its cleansing, no man can be set apart for God's use or blessing.

(3) God does not use unclean vessels. For believers, those saved and cleansed by the work of Christ, this command for consecration demonstrates the necessity for cleansing through confession or getting right with God and with men in order to be used of God and to experience His deliverance. To experience God's power, protection, and deliverance, we need to prepare our hearts and deal with the known sin in our lives through confession (cf. Josh. 7:13; with Ex. 19:10, 22).

(4) Keeping in mind the idea of dedication associated with this word, this command reminds us of the necessity of understanding our purpose as God's people along with a commitment to God and His purpose. It meant they were to set themselves apart to Yahweh to cross the Jordan so they could enter the land, defeat the enemies, and become a testimony to the nations (Ex. 19:4-6).

(5) The command, especially in New Testament theology, suggests the need of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and His control for consecrated living. This command suggests this because of the prevalence of anointing mentioned in connection with consecration of the priests, etc. (cf. Ex. 40 also). It stresses the need of the filling of the Holy Spirit as God's enabling agent for dealing with the forces arrayed

against us—the flesh, the devil, and the world (Acts 1:8; Eph. 3:16; 5:18; Gal. 5:16f and 6:1).

The Promise of Passage Through the Jordan (3:7–13)

These verses in essence reinforce the concept of grace. They show that crossing the Jordan and dispossessing the enemies (as in all aspects of our salvation and sanctification) is the work of God. The things we do in consecration are not works of righteousness that merit God's favor or overcome the enemies. Rather, the acts of consecration, like confession, remove the barriers to God's power, to fellowship, and so prepare our hearts to receive God's grace: they build our faith so we will put our feet in the water, cross over, and go up against the enemy.

The Promise to Joshua (vs. 7)

To be effective, leaders need the right credentials, namely, solid biblical training under men of God who truly know God and His word and the obvious hand of God on a leader's life. So it was time that God establish Joshua as His representative to guide the nation.

Note Joshua 4:14. It is significant that it was God who did the exalting. Our tendency is to exalt ourselves, but Joshua, in reporting God's communication to him, said nothing about this promise of being exalted. Rather, when reporting the words of God to Israel, he focused their attention on the fact that it was the living God who was among them and that it was He and He alone who would dispossess the enemies of the land (vs. 10).

The Commands for the Priests (vs. 8)

Since it was the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant, and since it was the ark that represented God's person and power, they alone were to take the Ark to the edge of the water and stand still in the water. What do we gather from this? It reminds us of our part in the plan of God. We must learn to step out in faith and obedience to the principles and promises of Scripture. It reminds us of the need to rest in God's promises. They were not to run down into the waters. This is just like the words of Moses in Exodus 14:13-14 when they were hemmed in with the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh and his chariots behind them.

But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation (Hebrew, yeshua) of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent" (Exodus 14:13-14).

We are reminded of Isaiah 30:15: "For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, 'In repentance and rest you shall be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength.' But you were not willing, ..."

Joshua's Humility (vss. 9-13)

The Bible does not record many times when God spoke directly to a large group of people. He usually spoke to one or a few individuals-people He had especially selected to be His divine mouthpiece. At this time in history of Israel, Joshua was God's divine messenger to them.

After God spoke directly to Joshua, notice that he did not say to the people: "Today you will begin to see God exalt *me* in your presence!"

Rather, Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the *living God is among you!*” By rights, Joshua could have repeated exactly what God had said to him. He could have told them “The Lord told me, Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses.” (v7)

But he didn't. There was no hint of pride or arrogance! His concern was that God be honored and glorified in what was about to happen.

But think of the temptation Joshua must have faced. How easy it would have been to draw attention to himself and to attempt to build his own ego. And what greater opportunity to engage in a lot of self-glorification. God Himself had spoken specifically to Joshua about the fact that He would exalt him.

A Man's Area of Greatest Vulnerability

Joshua, primarily because of his feelings of insecurity, was very vulnerable to this kind of temptation. Remember how threatened he was when he realized that Moses' mantle had fallen on his shoulders? He was so frightened he literally trembled. Fearful people are vulnerable to pride. They often overreact to praise and honor. Their temptation toward self-exaltation is often greater than it is in people who are basically secure.

Joshua, however, did not respond either with false humility or with pride. He had discovered security in God's promises to him. He was able to rise above the temptation to glorify himself. He gave honor to the only One who could be given credit for the miracle that was about to take place.

A Man God Could Trust

Joshua's response was admirable, especially in view of the fact that he had been fearful and threatened by this great task. But his response shows the main reason why God chose to use Joshua in the first place. He knew He could trust him with this leadership role. He knew Joshua could handle the temptation that comes to every individual who is entrusted with great responsibility.

Understand, however, that God *does use men*---their talents, their gifts, and their abilities. Joshua was a leader God could use. He had proven himself many times. He was a brilliant strategist. He had sent out the spies, he had thought through the issues, and he had communicated effectively to his leaders. But when it came to telling the children of Israel what God's plan was for him specifically, he completely bypassed the opportunity to exalt himself. What a mark of spiritual maturity!

Passage by the Power of God (3:14–17)

After breaking camp, as instructed, the priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, led the way and walked to the Jordan which was swollen over its banks. This must have been a fearful sight, but resting in the presence of the living God they stepped into the waters. Immediately, a miracle occurred.

In the Bible Knowledge Commentary, Campbell writes:

Though the place named "Adam" is found only here it is usually identified with Tell ed-Damiyeh, about 16 miles north of the ford opposite Jericho. A wide stretch of riverbed therefore was dried up,

allowing the people with their animals and baggage to hurry across (cf. Josh. 4:10).

How could this sensational event occur? Many insist that this was no miracle since the event can be explained as a natural phenomenon. They point out that on December 8, 1267 an earthquake caused the high banks of the Jordan to collapse near Tell ed-Damiyeh, damming the river for about 10 hours. On July 11, 1927 another earthquake near the same location blocked the river for 21 hours. Of course these stoppages did not occur during flood season. Admittedly God could have employed natural causes such as an earthquake and a landslide and the timing would have still made it a miraculous intervention. But does the biblical text allow for such an interpretation of this event?

Considering all the factors involved it seems best to view this occurrence as a special act of God brought about in a way unknown to man. Many supernatural elements were brought together: (1) The event came to pass as predicted (3:13, 15). (2) The timing was exact (v. 15). (3) The event took place when the river was at flood stage (v. 15). (4) The wall of water was held in place for many hours, possibly an entire day (v. 16). (5) The soft, wet river bottom became dry at once (v. 17). (6) The water returned immediately as soon as the people had crossed over and the priests came up out of the river (4:18).²⁰

As one studies this third chapter and marvels at the miraculous work of God displayed here, there is an important principle that should not be missed. Crossing the Jordan at flood stage with two million people had several immediate results: God was magnified, Joshua was exalted (3:5), the people were surely energized and motivated, and the people of the land, the Canaanites, were terrorized (cf. 1:9; 5:1). God was giving them the land. Indeed, He had already done so, providentially speaking (1:2-6; 2:9), but the people of the land were not

going to simply lie down. The inhabitants of the land would resist with all the resources at their disposal. Crossing the Jordan and possessing their possession was not going to be a piece of cake. It would entail battle after battle. Crossing the Jordan, then, meant two things for Israel. First, they must be totally committed to going against armies, chariots, and fortified cities. But then, if they were to be successful, they must also be committed to a focused walk of faith in Yahweh, the only true and living God rather than, as they had done in the wilderness, a walk according to the flesh and their own resources.

For believers today, crossing 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. For the Israelites Canaan was hardly heaven!) It is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised. This should mean the end of a life lived by human effort and the beginning of a life of faith and obedience.²¹

Application/Activity

I will text each of you this week and ask for one prayer, for yourself, for the upcoming day. Once I have a response from most of you, I will send a mass text out to all of you and ask you, when and if you have the time, to pray for each other for that day. God can use anyone for His purposes, even a motley group of believers such as us. Also, give thought and prayer to my idea for our Crusade. I want to obtain our own blow up bounce house and water slide, along with a trailer to store it in, a grill and funds (outside of church) for food and begin our own ministry on the eastside of Fort Worth. I want to reach out to the children and young adults who have very few positive role models and even fewer spiritual role models. We will join with one or several churches on the eastside. We need to put thought to how we obtain this funding and how do we work the message of Christ into our events. My goal is for us to have our FIRST (with many more to come) event by the end of the summer.

From Joshua, Living as a Consistent Role Model and

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