

Intro:

Continuing Be Strong series in Joshua. Last week- story of Rahab, how the faith of this woman saved her and her family from the impending destruction, and how her faith also encouraged Joshua and the Israelites as they follow God into the Promised Land.

The only thing lying between the Israelites and the entrance to the promised land was the Jordan River. Today, we're in Joshua 3- gonna look at the Jordan river miracle and see how when the Israelites are fully surrendered to God, that God will work in amazing ways in their lives.

PRAY

1. THE PREPERATION

Before we dive into this text and look at the preparation that Israel had to undergo before God led them across the Jordan River, we need to point out the central role of the ark of the covenant in the whole episode.

This ark of the covenant isn't just something from an Indiana Jones movie. The ark first appears in Joshua here in verse 3. Following verse 3, it is mentioned another 16 times in chapters 3 and 4.

Thus the ark- sign of Yahweh's presence among his people- meets us at every tum, reminding us that it is Yahweh himself who leads his people into Canaan, who cuts off flooding waters and holds them back as it were with his hand. The writer refuses to allow us to lose sight of it!

Image of Ark The Ark was a small golden box, designed by God and built by men according to instructions given by God in Exodus 25. The Ark was housed in a portable "temple" called the Tabernacle, where the glory of God visibly presided among Israel and sacrifices were made for the sins of the people.

The Ark of the Covenant is the most holy possession Israel has. It contained Aaron the High Priest's rod, a jar of manna, and the 10 commandments. Among many things, it symbolized the promise of God, the Law of God, the presence of God and, as God spoke from above the mercy seat to Moses, it is often equated with God himself.

So here in our text, Joshua and the leaders are preparing the people to be led across the Jordan River. verse 2-4 [2] **At the end of three days the officers went through the camp [3] and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. [4] Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before."**

The commanders tell the people to follow the Ark of the Covenant when it starts across the Jordan River. For years, Israel had followed a pillar of cloud, now the Ark of the Covenant would lead them. They would not be led by military scouts but priests who bear the ark, not by the great General Joshua astride a horse, but by God himself.

A. FOLLOW AFTER GOD

But specifically here, since the ark represents the presence of God, In preparation, the leaders were telling the people to **follow after God**. The leaders tell the people to stay 2,000 cubits behind the ark. A cubit is 18 inches, so the people were supposed to follow the ark at a distance of a little over ½ Mile, about 1,000 yards, or 10 football fields.

The reason for the distance from the ark is in order that the people can tell where to go as well as so they can witness God cutting off of the Jordan River. Think about it- If they followed too closely, they could easily miss the big show. This way, by letting God lead and following after Him, they could see God's great deed and could all know the path to take.

But there's also a secondary reason why they were supposed to follow God. Through this instruction, God reminds Israel- I'm Holy. I'm not just another beer buddy, I'm not your spiritual vending machine, I'm not some idol you can approach flippantly.

I'm Almighty, take your shoes off your on holy ground, shield your eyes, lie on your face, don't touch me or you die, God. The Ark is one of those symbols that presents God as personal and present, but all together Holy and Fearsome.

Following God is so huge and difficult for us. So many times, instead of following after God, we do something different.

Walking beside God is a God-is-my-co/pilot kind of mentality- He's in the front seat, sometimes going back and forth between shotgun and the drivers seat. And though that sounds nice and biblical, the truth is, there is a problem with assuming that **God is your co-pilot or assistant**.

You can appear like you love Jesus, as if you are sitting right next to him as you make decisions. You may even turn to scripture, prayer or Godly counsel for advice-

BUT when the advice contradicts where they "feel" they want to go, they ignore their co-pilot who is screaming- Dude- you're about to run into a mountain! Walking beside God is a way of fooling everyone into believing God is flying the plane, when in fact, you are. **If you walk beside God, you aren't following him.**

Walking in front of God: The dangers of walking in front of God might seem obvious and not worthy of mentioning- but truthfully, how many of us live here most the time? We makes decisions without God because, well we can. Because it's easier. Because we think we're pretty smart ourselves. Because we think We got this.

We start walking without ever asking God for a direction. Instead of opening our bibles, we start making PROS and CONS lists. These people approach the Jordan River not asking God what do you wanna do here, but instead we start plotting according to our own wisdom of what we think is easiest and safest. How many bad situations have we gotten ourselves into because we walked out in front of God doing our own thing

No- we are to follow God, to walk behind God. There are good reasons for us to walk at a distance— we need to be far enough back so that we (and everyone with us) can SEE where God is leading.

That means positioning God and His Word at a prominent place in your life, in a position to take direction from. **Walking beside or in front of God makes it difficult to actually see where God is leading.**

How do I know how I am walking? Do you ever ask what God would have you do, read what God has said, before you have to make a decision or after?

Let me encourage you- if you've got marital decisions in front of you, financial decisions, relational

decisions, decisions to resolve conflict, Are you allowing God to lead you through this, or are you walking beside or in front of God?

B. CONSECRATE YOURSELVES

But not only were the people supposed to prepare by following God, but they were to prepare their attitude and hearts for God's work. [5] Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

He says consecrate yourselves. What does this mean? In the OT, it means a special preparation that was demanded of the people whenever God was going to reveal himself in a special way. They might have been required to wash their clothes and abstaining from sexual relations; likely confession of sins as well.

They are not preparing themselves for a wonderful EVENT, they are preparing themselves for WORSHIP, to be in the presence of God

As part of Joshua's final instructions to the people, you would expect him to remind the people about strategy and safety and building a bridge. Instead- he makes sure they are prepared and equipped spiritually.

This is a reminder to us that the most important thing in assuring prosperity and "success" in planting a church, or leading a ministry, cultivating a marriage, or building a family, is not strategy and pragmatism...it's purity, setting yourself apart for God's Work in all areas of life.

So why spend all this time and worry about preparing? Why worry about the distance of following God and our attitudes? It's important, it's crucial because Israel must recognize that what happens is indeed God's work.

It's not themselves that are doing this- this is God's work among the people, and unless they have proper insight, expectancy, and preparation, they could see God's work and yet not understand its true value and significance.

Many years ago as a young Boy Scout, I was able to go to a national jamboree in Virginia. On the way to Virginia, we were able to travel to Disney World, I've been Washington DC prior to the national jamboree.

I had the privilege of seeing several national monuments while I was there. The problem is, it was an add-on to my trip. I had not prepared to understand the places I was going. Without that preparation, it seemed like it was just historical bits and pieces not properly appreciated.

Sadly, I can't remember $\frac{3}{4}$ of those amazing monuments I was able to see.

This is why this preparation is important. God's people must be rightly prepared for God's 'show' if they are going to appreciate it, if they are going to be strengthened in their faith.

Yeah- God may not cut a path through rivers for you and I any more, but the principle remains. Do you prepare yourself for public worship of-God?

If we are not impressed with the grandeur of the living God in public worship, is it because we have not prepared ourselves to see him as such? Could it even be that we even fail to detect the God's marvelous working in the routine affairs of our lives simply because we have not prepared ourselves to see or even expect that?

2. PURPOSES FOR THE JORDAN RIVER MIRACLE

The second section of this chapter identifies two **purposes** for how God will lead the Israelites across the Jordan River. The first reason is in verse [7] **The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.**

A. AFFIRM JOSHUA'S LEADERSHIP

God tells Joshua that the coming miracle is going to **affirm Joshua's leadership**, to exalt him in a sense, just as he did with Moses.

Given the death of Moses, who was such a tremendous leader for Israel, and given the reality of the struggle that they were going to face in the conquest of the land, it was crucial that Joshua be secure in his position and that Israel be confident of his leadership under God.

B. ASSURANCE OF GOD'S POWER

The second purpose of this upcoming miracle was to **provide assurance of God's power**. v10. [10] **And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.**

There is a certain logic behind this assurance. If God can tame a raging river, he can also repel attacking Amorites. If he can stop up the Jordan, he can put down the Canaanites. If he can get you into the land, he can surely give you the land. This is a reasoning of faith, it's logic mixed with theology- theo-logic.

Paul uses the same "reasoning of faith" in Romans 8:32- if God did not hold back but gave up his own Son for us, if he went that far, than how can we not then rest assured that God will graciously give us all things required for our full salvation?

This "reasoning of faith" is what Israel failed to use in Exodus 16; they should have realized that the God who delivered them from Egypt would not let go of them in the wilderness.

The rescue at the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus- these are explosions of God's power that are meant to colour the whole horizon our lives in order to assure us that the God who so mightily handles great emergencies is surely adequate for the smaller crises and anxieties that beset us.

3. CROSSING THE JORDAN- GOD'S WAY

And finally- the chapter concludes with the **Crossing of the Jordan- but it's done in God's way.** v14-17

[14] **So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, [15] and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), [16] the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. [17] Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.**

Carried by the Levitical priests, the Ark of the Covenant leads the way into the Jordan. At this time, the Jordan River is as large as it ever is with banks overflowing.

In this season- the river is most likely at least a mile wide and a raging seasonal torrent. The writer makes a point in verse 15 to explain how **insane a crossing at this time of year is, the river is full and above its banks.**

The point is, left to their own wisdom, the leaders would not have chosen to cross at this point, at this place, at this time of the year.

Let me tell you- it's crazy. Faithfully following God is never IDEAL from our perspective, never convenient, never the right time, never pain free, never fully understandable—but it is EXACTLY the right time for God to show up and do something that only He could do. God's timing is never "ideal" in the eyes of men, but it's always perfectly suited to maximize His glory.

Let me ask you a question. Who is this story about? Who is the main character in this story? Seems logical that it might be the people of Israel. Isn't the purpose of this chapter is to get the people to the other side of the river? Well, maybe Joshua is the purpose, right? He's the leader. The title of the book is His name, so isn't it all about Him?

No, this story, it's all about God. It's all about God and His majesty and His glory. God prepared His people to see God do something miraculous. He told them the reason behind why he was about to do this miraculous thing.

And then he did what no one else could or would do. This story is all about Him.

I've been thinking about some of my old kids at MH. Some of them are like the Israelites coming out of Egypt. They've seen God do some amazing things. They've seen God's love for them when no one else would love them unconditionally. They've seen God change the course of their friend's and families lives, they've seen God do tremendous things.

But unfortunately, a few of them are doing what many of us do. They've forgotten to let God out front, they've forgotten to follow God and let God lead. Instead- they do what we are tempted to do every day- and that's be our own gods, make our own decisions, maybe to sound spiritual and say God's my co-pilot in the drivers seat, but really we want to do our own thing.

See, like I said- story isn't about the Israelites or Joshua- it's about God. Our lives are the same thing. Our lives aren't about us, it's not about you or me or your family, it's not about your happiness. It's about God.

What we see in this chapter is the Israelites are surrendered to God- they, by faith in both word and action, they have surrendered their own ways in order to follow God- and when they do that, God shows up and does the miraculous.

This is the same thing that happens in our lives. If we surrender to God- if we put Him and His word out front in our lives and we follow after Him- IF we surrender to Him- He does things like stopping a raging river.

He does things like heals broken relationships. He does things like solves our deepest heartaches. He does things like give us purpose and hope. He does things like changing us from the inside out and makes us a new creation.

He does things likes frees us from addiction and frees us from the fear of people. He does things like using people like you and I to change the culture of the city and people around us.

And what we're gonna see, is as the Israelites, who have surrendered to God and God has brought them into the promised land, they are gonna have to surrender to God every day forward. They are not done.

Sure, God has given them a victory, sure He's blessed them, but they still have a whole land before them. If they are going to continue to see God work in their lives, they will have to battle every single day against our desire to put ourselves back out front, to make ourselves our gods all over again.

It is a daily battle, it's a thing that we daily surrender, we continually have to put God our front and follow

after Him and His word and His will, and not our own.

CONCLUSION:

Amen? I want to invite you to respond to God's word with me this morning. Here at Restoration Church, our services are set up intentionally to include several worship songs after the message to give us the opportunity to respond to God's word.

What is it that God has spoken to you personally about today? Have you been trying to walk beside God or in front of God instead of following God, and finding life not going as you thought?

Have you had a shameful week, a week that you don't feel consecrated, you don't feel prepared or worthy to approach God? God is a God of grace and mercy, his forgiveness is available to you today.

Have you made the story of your life all about you, and not about God? Have you struggled surrendering to God and emptying yourself to Him?

Today, Jesus is calling. You know what He's spoken to you about. You may need to take these next few minutes and respond to Him, take this time to cry out to God, to confess your sin to Him and seek his grace and mercy.

You may need to take this time to pray and seek His answers and seek His involvement in the difficult circumstances.

Or you may need to take this time to join the worship team in Praising God for who He is and what He has done, to prepare your heart to follow God this week.

If you would like to pray with me, I will be up front, feel free to come forward. Let's Pray.