

The Jordan Crossing

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[0 : 00] Joshua, chapter 3, verse 1. Joshua told the people, 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. And the Lord said to Joshua, Joshua said to the Israelites, Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.

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.

See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.

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.

[2 : 04] So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 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, 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 Ereba, the salt sea was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

The priest 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.

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests stood, and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.

[3 : 16] So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan.

Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, What do these stones mean?

Tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.

So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua.

Joshua and they carried them over with them to their camp where they put them down. Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carry the ark of the covenant had stood.

[4 : 24] And they are there to this day. Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua.

The people hurried over. And as soon as all of them had crossed the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, armed in front of the Israelites.

As Moses had directed them, about forty thousand armed for battle, crossed over before the Lord to the plains of Jericho for war. That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, Command the priests carrying the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan. So Joshua commanded the priests, Come up out of the Jordan.

And the priests came up out of the river, carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

[5 : 39] On the tenth day of the first month, the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan.

He said to the Israelites, In the future, when your descendants ask their fathers, what do these stones mean? Tell them, Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.

He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God. I can just imagine a certain man going fishing that morning.

He went down to the banks of the Jordan and see if he could catch anything. And he had probably been there a few hours. Maybe he caught something when he noticed something funny going on.

[6 : 53] And maybe at the beginning he thought it was just his imagination, but it seemed like the water of the Jordan was going down. It was as if someone had pulled the plug or turned off the faucet and the water was draining away.

And pretty soon he realized it couldn't be just his imagination. It was completely dry now. And he stood there, maybe with his fishing pole in his hand, wondering what had happened.

As he looked, it was just rocks and dirt. And terrified, he runs home. And this is the days before cell phones and TV coverage.

So maybe it took a few days before he figured out what had happened. A great nation that had been on one side of the Jordan was now on the other side of the Jordan.

Their Lord had dried up the flooded river. And they had walked over, and you noticed it again and again on this passage, they had walked over on dry ground.

[8 : 06] And as that sunk in, this man's heart melted. Well, the fishermen weren't the only people looking at the river that morning.

There was definitely, it doesn't say, but it's easy to imagine that there were a few men, a few officers from Jericho, keeping an eye on this great horde of people that were right on the other side of the river from them.

And maybe the king had told them to keep an eye on this great horde of people, make sure you know what they're doing. And so that's probably what they were doing.

They weren't the only ones, or that fisherman wasn't the only one watching what was going on that morning. These men were probably looking for somebody to, were they starting to build a bridge? Were they getting wood together? They were looking for any sign of crossing. Not that they thought they had anything to worry about that particular morning.

[9 : 12] Because it was springtime. The Jordan was flooded. It's not like this was the time to cross the river. Jericho had two great defenses.

The first and the most famous are those walls. We're going to see those fall later. But the second was the Jordan River. Both of them strong.

Both of them formidable. And that morning was like all the rest until those officers just saw commotion on the other side of the river.

They saw people heading down to the river banks. To the river bank. And I don't think we should imagine it in a nice single file line.

This is a whole nation moving all at once. They're moving down to the river. And off to one side, a thousand yards away, are men carrying a box on poles.

[10 : 12] And as soon as those men carrying that box put their feet in the river, the water stopped flowing. And all the water downstream rushed on down and was dried up.

And so you can imagine their terror as that nation that was on the other side begins crossing over. hordes of an army in the front and then men and women and children and animals. And they start crossing the rocky riverbed and they kept coming and coming until they reached the other side. And when the men who were carrying that box, when they came out on the other side, you could hear something in the north. The water rushing down the riverbed until the Jordan was put back into its place.

And these officers, this reconnaissance unit, probably no doubt in a hurry and in a frenzy, run off to their king to explain to them, to him, what had happened.

[11 : 29] They're all in a frenzy. And when he hears, his heart melts and then the word gets out and from house to house to house, it's the same story over and over again.

The Jordan dried up. They are coming. They are coming. And nothing can stop them. Joshua 5, one says that all their hearts melted.

Earlier, it had been they were melting and now this finished the job. Their hearts melted. But what was it like in the Israelite camp that night?

So I want you to imagine, we've imagined it from Jericho's perspective, from this guy's perspective, but how would you feel if you were in the Israelite camp that night?

If that happened to you, how would you feel if you saw that? If you went through that? Well, I think you would feel fear too.

[12 : 37] I think you would feel some fear as well. You would probably feel like the disciples felt when they were on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus in that boat in the storm and he is asleep and they wake him up and he tells the wind and the waves to be still and they are they're immediately stilled and the Gospels say they went from afraid to very afraid.

And they asked who is this? What manner of man is this? That's not an entirely comfortable question. That is not a trivia question. A quiz question. They aren't necessarily happy to be in this little boat with that man.

This is more than they had reckoned on. I have a feeling. Now, so the lesson for Israel on the other side of the Jordan was clear. Our God is not to be trifled with.

Not to be trifled with. But on the other hand, tied to that fear, there had to be this great sense of awe and confidence. That their God had done that for them.

That he had done that for them. So tell me, now here you are on the other side. You just went through that.

[14 : 03] What do those seven nations look like now? What do the kings look like now? What do the giants look like now? What do the cities with the great walls look like now? I think the land just went from being this hard nut to crack.

This, how are we going to do this? How is this going to happen? A land full of dangers. It went from that to, this is nothing but low-hanging fruit.

This is ours for the taking. It went from a big problem to being no problem at all. Not with God with us. God is going to do what he said he's going to do.

After hundreds and hundreds of years, the day is finally here. He's going to keep his promise. We are going to take this land. So what about us? What does Joshua 3 and 4 teach us?

Does God keep his promises to us? Has he promised things for us? Is God for us? These things were written to strengthen our faith.

[15 : 16] These things were written to encourage us so that we could know our God. Because the God who dried up the Jordan River is your God. He's the God you live with.

He's the God that loves you. He's the God that promised to be with you. He's the God yesterday. The same yesterday, today, and forever. So Joshua 3 and 4 is full of valuable, encouraging, soul-strengthening lessons for us.

So the same events that melted the hearts of the people in Jericho and the people of the Canaanites, those same events drove steel into the hearts of the Israelites.

Israelites. It melted one and it strengthened the other and it should drive steel into our hearts as well. And so, tonight I have four encouraging lessons from Joshua 3 and 4.

Four encouraging lessons. And the first comes in the form of a question. And this is the question when it comes to answering this question.

[16 : 22] The question is this, why not the fords? Or why here? Why now?

Was this the only way the Jordan River could ever be crossed? The answer is no. The Jordan was not totally impassable.

In chapter 2, it mentioned the fords of the Jordan. There was a road from Jericho that went down to the fords of the Jordan. The fords were the place where the river could be crossed.

And you remember in chapter 2, Rahab sends them on their way and the soldiers go looking down the road toward the fords of the Jordan. probably thinking if they're going to cross the Jordan, they're going to cross there.

They're going to want to get back to their own people. It makes sense that they go down to the fords to cross. And so, while we don't know for certain, but it does seem possible that Israel could.

[17 : 31] It would be slow. It would be difficult. But they probably, even now, in the flooded stage, could have possibly crossed there at the fords. But even if they weren't passable, even if they weren't passable, the Jordan wasn't always flooded.

It mentions it specifically. It was the time of the harvest. It was springtime now in Israel. And in the spring, the Jordan flooded. But it wasn't always flooded.

All God had to do was say, we're going to wait two months. And the Jordan would have gone from big, flooded to at least a crossable river.

So, why not the fords? Why not the humanly possible way? Why not the summer? Why here? Why now? Why do it this way?

Because God wanted them to cross the river in the time and in the place when it was impossible for them to humanly do it.

[18 : 43] So, if they didn't cross now, they were going to miss some valuable lessons. If they didn't cross now, they were going to miss some valuable lessons. They were going to miss lessons that they could only learn when it was flooded.

And so, this story, we shouldn't see it as so much about crossing the river. We should see it as, this is Israel getting to know their God.

This is the Lord showing His power and His presence for His people as they get ready to cross over. And there is a lesson here for us, for every single one of us.

God in our lives isn't always going to take us to the fords. He's not always going to take us over the river and through the river in the summertime.

He's not always going to give us wood to build a bridge. He's not always going to bring us to places where we can do it on our own. He's going to take us down to the flooded Jordan.

[19 : 48] where we can't cross it unless He helps us. He's going to take us to that flooded Jordan and say to us, now watch how I get you across.

Watch what I'm going to do here. Now we meet our flooded Jordans in all kinds of places. Where things, we run into the things that are just too hard for us.

Maybe it's in our own hearts. Maybe it's outside of us. Maybe it's our own families. I don't need to get super specific. You can think of the places where God has brought you to the place where you say, this is humanly impossible.

We can't do this unless He does something. So in those moments, should we say that's it? The Jordan is flooded.

We can't go on. No, because God doesn't take us to those fords. Just because God doesn't take us to the fords doesn't mean He's done with us.

[20 : 59] It doesn't mean that that's all the further we're going. There's lots of times He takes us down to the flood. And He puts us in a corridor where it's Him or nothing. And He does that because He has something to teach us about Himself.

He has something to teach us about His faithfulness and His power and His presence. See, the fords, the summer, those are places where we can rely upon ourselves.

Those are places where we have the resources that we need. But it's in the floods that we learn to trust. It's in the floods where we need God's power.

We need Him to come through and we pray and we trust Him to do it. The flood is where we learn all that. And so God takes every believer down into the floods because when we get to the other side, we are different.

We're more sanctified. Life looks different. God looks different. Future challenges look different. Kings and giants and big cities with great walls, they look different on the other side of the flood.

[22 : 11] They aren't so tough anymore, not with God with us. Now the floods can be very frightening. You notice that the Israelites, when they were in the riverbed, they didn't dawdle.

They hurried over. They weren't, this wasn't a calm, peaceful thing. They hurried over. It can be frightening.

But on the other side, the fruit is sweet. It's worth it that we went through that flooded river.

So are you there? Are you to that place where this is so much, this is too much, this is too hard, we can't do this, we need God's help? I want you to see God's heart in it.

This isn't about making your life easy. God doesn't choose the most convenient, the most comfortable paths for us to walk.

[23 : 13] But he is teaching you. He is for you. And so don't lose heart. He's doing this so that you'll learn to know him better. So that's the first lesson.

God takes us to the flood, not the fords. The second is this, God is with his people. God is with his people when they're in the impossible situation.

What is the drying up of the Jordan all about? It's about God saying to Israel, I'm with you. I'm with you. I'm here. Look at chapter 3, verse 9.

Joshua said to the Israelites, come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites and so on.

What is this crossing of the river all about? It's about this. This is what it's saying to Israel. This is what it's saying to us.

[24 : 21] The living God is among us. He's with us. We see it nine times in this passage. The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned. The Ark of the Covenant was meant to symbolize, to embody the presence of God with him.

And so he says the Ark of the Lord of all the earth will go ahead of you. This isn't just the Ark of just some God. He's the God. He's the Lord of all of the earth.

And that's what you learn when God takes you down into the flooded waters.

That's what you learn when he takes you to the edge of the impossible. And then he says this is the way I'm going to take you. And then the waters part for you.

He says I'm going to lead you. So again think of your own hard thing. Think of your own impossible situation.

[25 : 24] The message of this chapter is you aren't alone in it. You aren't alone. The Lord of all of the earth is with you. And if he is with you, who can stand against you?

If he's on your side in the rivers, when you go down into the rivers, then in the words of the psalmist, they'll writhe, they'll flee in his presence, the mountains, will shake and split open.

And so brothers and sisters, how often are we afraid? How often do we doubt? How often do we forget who is with us? And so we come into these situations and it's like God is nowhere to be found.

We don't see him. We don't feel him. He doesn't we forget all about him. But again, nine times in this passage, the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned, it's saying God is with you.

He is with them. He's with them in all of his holiness and his mercy and all of his justice and his power. And so you can imagine that scene in your mind is the Ark of the Covenant is a thousand yards away, but it is what is standing between all the Israelites and all of that water.

[26 : 40] water. And as long as the Lord stood in the river, they were safe. And as long as the Lord was there, nothing could touch them.

It was true for them and it's true for us. This is where we can fit Romans chapter 8 into this passage where it's neither life nor death, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all of creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Our God is with us, close to us, among us. And so what should we do? Joshua's word to the people is consecrate yourselves in verse 4.

That is dedicate yourselves, sanctify yourselves, wash yourselves, get yourselves ready. I am going to show up in a big way. I'm going to be present among you.

I'm going to do something wonderful for you. And so dedicate yourself to me, body and soul. And for us, you know what, it's not an ark of the covenant a thousand yards away.

[27 : 49] How close is God to us? You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You're the walking, talking temple of God, so consecrate yourselves.

The words of James, wash your hands. Purify your hearts. So that's the second lesson. That's the second big lesson here that this passage is teaching us, that God is with us.

You see the third lesson there in chapter 4, verse 24. So now we're skipping all the way to the end of this section. Chapter 4, 24. The Lord says why he did it.

He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful so that you might always fear the Lord your God. So not only is God with his people, the Lord is mighty for his people.

He's not only with us, he is strong for us, he is mighty for us. He's called the Lord of all the earth and he shows his lordship by commanding the waters.

[29 : 02] By commanding the waters. He shows his lordship by calling his shot. He says this is what I'm going to do and then what he says he's going to do, he does.

He says he's going to do it and then he does it. The most legendary at-bat in baseball history happened in 1932, the World Series.

It was the Cubs versus the Yankees. It was at Wrigley Field and Babe Ruth had two strikes. And according to the stories, the Cubs bench was mocking him and then supposedly, according to Babe Ruth especially, he pointed his bat to center field.

And then on the next pitch, so he called his shot and the next pitch he hit a ball that landed in the seats in Sheffield Avenue outside of Wrigley Field, outside of the regular seating.

So great feats are always extraordinary but they're extra, extraordinary when you say this is what I'm going to do and then you do it.

[30 : 22] and that's what God does here and he doesn't do it with a little baseball. He does it with a flooded river rushing down the river, the riverbed.

It's rushing down this valley at full force and he says I'm going to dry up that river. Well how is that going to happen? But he says I'm going to do it and then the river dries up.

But that's our God. He calls his shots and then he hits his home runs. He does what he says he's going to do. He says I will save you to the uttermost.

That's what he says to us. He's calling a shot. Every single one of his promises are saying God is saying this is what I'm going to do. He says I'm going to save you to the uttermost. Heaven, hell, whatever, nothing is going to be able to take you out of my hands.

And everything is trying to tear us out of his hands but the Lord is mighty for his people. He has us. He has us. It's called a shot.

[31 : 29] We sang of it even this evening. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. So is God strong enough to save his people?

Is God strong enough to make every man bow? bow? So men rushed into the garden of Gethsemane with torches and swords.

We're looking for somebody. Who are you looking for? We're looking for Jesus. Jesus. I am he. down they went. One time Steve Camp he preached at the family conference.

This was years and years ago and he told this story. He was or he is, I'm not sure, a contemporary Christian music artist. Steve was. Prince and he was at a studio in LA recording a record and at the same time in that same studio was Prince recording a record of his own.

And you know Prince the purple wearing rock star guy. And they had a chance to talk. And Steve had a chance to talk to Prince about Jesus.

[32 : 47] And at one point Steve said to Prince every knee will bow to Jesus someday. And Prince supposedly fired back I don't bow before anyone.

So fast forward 20 years now. And Prince is dead and he has bowed. Jesus God has called a shot. He's going to show his strength. He said this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to make every heart submit to me. And so the question is will it be a willing bow?

Will it be the bow of a friend meeting his king? The glad bow? Or will it be on your face shattered? Listen to C.S. Lewis. God is going to invade. All right. God is going to see you on his side.

[33 : 54] Then when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else, something it never entered into your head to conceive comes crashing in something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left.

for this time it will be God without a disguise. Something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature.

It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible for you to stand up.

God has called a shot. Are you ready to bow? Do you have a savior who will speak for you then? Do you have a righteousness that will answer his eyes then?

So God does what he says. He's mighty for his people. He's mighty to save. He's the Lord of all of the earth. It's a message right out of Joshua chapter 3 and 4.

[35 : 14] That's what Israel saw that day. And so what were giants? What were cities? What were kings in front of him? Before him? If God is for us, who can be against us?

And so the last lesson, really quick is this, quickly is this. It's just one word, remember. Remember. chapter 4 is mostly about setting up this memorial to remember this exact occasion.

So the Lord says, 12 men take 12 stones out of the bed of the Jordan River there. Hoist them on your shoulders. Walk out of the riverbed with them.

And when you get to the other side, we're going to build a memorial for what happened. And the question is, why? Why this memorial? Israel, and the answer is, so that every generation after this, all of the children, all of your children, will remember what happened here.

That they might never forget that Israel crossed over the Jordan, not on a bridge, not at the fords. They didn't walk on the water, they didn't have a bunch of boats, they walked on over the Jordan, through the Jordan, on dry ground.

[36 : 33] God never wanted Israel to forget how they entered into the promised land. So just a few things to say about this.

The first is that God's works are worth remembering. They're worth remembering. It's wrong to forget some things.

A lot of things we can forget and it's not wrong. But some things are wrong when you forget them. When God brings you through a flood, when he takes you down by the Jordan River and he opens the way for you, and you come out on the other side, it's wrong to forget he did that for you.

It's our shame when we forget what God has done for us. God He saved us. My question is, when was the last time you genuinely thanked God for saving you?

Remember, he did that. You cried out for mercy. You cried out for salvation. You needed it. And he answered you.

[37 : 51] And so what he did for you is worth remembering. It would be wrong for you to forget. The second lesson is this, is we need help remembering.

We need help remembering. God doesn't leave this whole remembering thing to chance. He says build this memorial so that you don't forget it. And isn't that why we have to keep doing the Lord's Supper?

Because we need to keep remembering. it loses its power on our hearts. It's not that we cognitively forget. It's that our hearts get out of line and it doesn't weigh what it should on our hearts.

And so the Lord's Supper is a regular reminder of the most amazing thing that God has ever done. He sent his son to take your sins and that son died.

He sacrificed himself for us. And it loses its power too easily upon our souls. And so we need help remembering. So that's why the Lord's Supper.

[38 : 54] That's why Good Friday. That's why even Easter and Christmas, these things that remind us of the things that God has done for us, they're good for us.

We need to be reminded. The third thing is remembering the past gives us strength for facing the present and the future.

Remembering the past gives us strength for the present and the future. Why this memorial?

Because Israel was going to run into other problems.

They were going to run into fresh problems, fresh obstacles. They were going to run into cities.

They were going to run into kings. They were going to run into giants. and they needed to remember this occasion.

So if they forgot this occasion, those obstacles were going to be totally debilitating, totally stopping. But if they remembered this occasion, then they could march straight into it with bold faith.

[40 : 06] And so our present faith is so often weak because we forget the past. We're weak because we're unhinged. We've forgotten what God has already done for us.

And so did he leave me then? That's a good question to ask. Did he leave me then? No, he didn't leave me then. Did he forget about me then? Did he leave me, abandon me?

Will he really abandon me now? Did he save me then just to watch me destroy now? Israel thought that thought.

It was a terrible thought. But if God saved us in the past, doesn't that say that he is going to save us now? He's not that kind of God.

And so armed with the past, we face the present. We face the future. So Joshua 3 and 4 is really summoning us to remember our own things in our own past, our own past salvation.

[41 : 14] The places where God was with us, where God was strong for us. He did save us. And armed with that, we face the present.

So these four encouraging lessons. God does take us to the floods. He doesn't always take us to the forts. And he does that for good reasons.

God is with his people. God is mighty for his people. And then remember, and that's the last word. Remember your past Jordans. Remember God's work in the past.

And with that, you can go boldly into your future. Well, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this story, for this reminder.

Holy Spirit, please come and press it in upon our own hearts. We are going to face difficulties and trials and tests. We are going to face hardship.

[42 : 18] We are going to face these places and these things that seem so impossible and so hard and we just don't see our way through it. Lord, help us to remember this story then.

That you are with your people. That you are strong for your people. And that you have delivered us in the past and so you will deliver us in the future.

So please help us. And I do pray for those who are lost, who are not ready for that final invasion. when the Lord comes in all of his glory.

Pray that you would even now win them, subdue their rebellious hearts and bring them to willing faith and love for you.

Show yourself strong in their own hearts. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.