

## Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3-4)

Valleys Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2014

### Intro

- We've been going through the book of Joshua.
- We previously looked at 40 years prior to this when 12 spies were sent to spy out the land, but 10 came back with a bad report, full of unbelief, leading to 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Only Caleb and Joshua were people of faith and God brought them back with the next generation to take the land.
- We also looked at Joshua after the death of Moses and him being called to be 'strong and courageous' to step into Moses' shoes and take the land.
- Last time looked at the story of Rahab the prostitute and noted how important she has been in Israel's history and is still an example to us today.

### Read Joshua 3 & 4

#### Joshua and the people showed dedication to God

- 3:1 'Joshua rose early in the morning'- see also 6:12,15; 7:16; 8:10,14. Jesus did the same- Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35; Lk 4:42 'at daybreak'). Jesus had been healing the sick and casting out demons the night before until much after sundown (Mk 1:32)-who knows what time this ministry session finished? They had brought 'all' who were sick in Capernaum- must have been a lot of people there. A life of miracles is also a life of commitment to prayer. Joshua knew what it was to dwell in the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle, even after Moses had left. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. Ex 33:11
- 3:5 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you'.
- What is sanctify? Why sanctify? How sanctify? Holiness=to be set apart- different from the common, or mundane, dedicated to God, kept special for his use. It is good to have times, regular and seasons where we draw away from the crowd, the hustle and bustle and get alone with God to focus on Him.
- Moses had also been commanded by God to get the people to consecrate/sanctify themselves:

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and **consecrate them** today and tomorrow. **Have them wash their clothes** and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put **limits for the people around the mountain** and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain." After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he **consecrated them, and they washed their clothes**. Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. **Abstain from sexual relations.**" (Exodus 19:10-15)

- How do we consecrate ourselves? Not by washing our clothes, or by Old Covenant ritual but by accepting Christ's blood which washes us whiter than snow. We return to the cross, we confess our sin before God and accept His forgiveness and grace, we re-dedicate our lives to Him, we pick up our cross to follow Him, we abandon ourselves in worship to Him, we offer our bodies to Him as living sacrifices, we spend time with Him, we pray, we fast, we listen to Him, we read His word, we make Him our FOCUS. In Antioch it was as the leaders were fasting they had the revelation to send out Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey- this

- decision changed the world- consecration has far reaching results.
- Our efforts of dedication to God cannot make us acceptable to God, only the cross can. However, when we can get into bad habits of living sloppy lives, forgetting about God and His grace which has redeemed us, forgetting about how He wants us to live etc. it's then time to re-focus on Him, taking our minds off ourselves and back to God, surrendering again to Him- this is our consecration as Christians, an ongoing, daily consecration of offering up our lives to Him.
  - **George Müller:** "There was a day when I died"; and, as he spoke, he bent lower, until he almost touched the floor. Continuing, he added, 'Died to George Müller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.'" Quoted by L. E. Maxwell, *Born Crucified*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1973), p. 60.
  - **D L Moody's Experience:** "Two men were walking by the banks of a river at the twilight hour. One of them said: "The world has yet to see what God can do with one man wholly dedicated to Him." His companion stopped and said: "Say that again." Again his friend repeated: "The world has yet to see what God can do with one man wholly dedicated to Him." Lifting his hand in the twilight, Dwight L. Moody said: "By the grace of God, I will be that man." And he went forth to do a work for God and His kingdom such as has been given to but few of His servants. Here was the reason for the great evangelist's power. Wholly dedicated to the will of God he was transformed and filled by the Spirit of God, and therefore empowered to do the work of God. Hudson Taylor said, "God's man, in God's place, doing God's work, in God's way," is the secret of power for every true servant of God." James McConkey, *The Surrendered Life*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Silver Publishing, 1923), p. 103.
  - **F B Meyer:** "Consecration is only possible when we give up our will about everything. As soon as we come to the point of giving ourselves to God, we are almost certain to become aware of the presence of one thing, if not of more, out of harmony with His will; and while we feel able to surrender ourselves in all other points, here we exercise reserve. Every room and cupboard in the house, with the exception of this, is thrown open to the new occupant. To give ninety-nine parts however, and to withhold the hundredth undoes the whole transaction." F B Meyer, *Light on Life's Duties*

### They had to 'cross over'

- Shittim was to the East of the river Jordan and the land they were to occupy was on the West side of the Jordan. They had gained a bridgehead east of the Jordan by conquering that region and killing the key Amorite kings Sihon (ruler of Heshbon) and Og (ruler of Bashan). Now, in order to gain their inheritance there was a need to cross the Jordan, but one problem- it was in flood! This time of year, during harvest, the snow on the mountains in Lebanon would melt causing the Jordan to flood.
- Two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh) had chosen to settle in the land East of the Jordan- the land of Gilead, because they liked it for their sheep and they were big tribes. Moses had formerly agreed this on the condition they first helped their brothers. Joshua re-iterated to these tribes they must first send a delegation of fighting men with their brothers across the Jordan to take the land West of Jordan first before going back to enjoy their land East of the Jordan (see Josh 2:13, quoting Moses in Num 32:29 & Deut 3:18). According to 4:13 40,000 soldiers went over the Jordan out of 110,000, the other 70,000 guarded their families and land East of the Jordan.
- For Israel the river was a barrier to cross in order to gain their inheritance. What is our river blocking us from taking our inheritance? Unbelief? Apathy? Comfort? It would have been far easier to settle for second best and become a settler rather than a pioneer, but God had called them to pioneer. In Church planting people see it with rose tinted spectacles sometimes, but it is a pioneering work. We are called to be pioneers as Christians- to take the land for Jesus, and not to settle.
- Paul and Glenda Scanlon in 1997 began to lead their Church, Abundant Life in Bradford through a transition in order to become more effective as Church in the mission God had called them to. This transition was so effective the Church has become one of the most successful in the UK at a time when many Churches are declining in number. This transition they termed 'crossing over' taken from Joshua crossing over the Jordan. What needs to happen to our Church, our lives for us to

- cross over into the things that God has for us?
- Church in UK in decline, Church in Valleys- many chapels closing, elderly congregations which will be closed in the next ten years unless something radical happens. Some are comfortable, apathetic, with a lack of concern for the lost. Crossing over means engaging our community, engaging new cultures, communicating a message not just to our congregation but to our community- we need creative ways to get the message 'out there'. We need to connect with each generation, not just sit comfortably in our own- this is the land God has called us to take for Him- let's cross over and take it!
- The most comfortable place to be when Jesus is walking on water is safe in the boat, but Jesus called back to Peter to get out of the boat into the choppy waters- Peter did it and pioneered something new- walking on water! Let's refuse to be cosy, let's get out of the boat! Let's cross over the Jordan!
- So the Jordan was in flood and the priests were called to step into it! This was a step of faith, just like Peter's when he stepped out of the boat and walked on water. What the younger generation had heard had happened with the Red Sea (and some had experienced as children) they were now going to experience with the Jordan, but it would take a step of faith. What step of faith is God calling you to take today?

### **They had to learn to follow God's lead**

- They were to keep a distance between them and the ark so they could all **see where God was leading them**. We need to likewise learn to be sensitive to what God is saying to us, learning to minister to others as He leads us. 'I do only what I see the Father doing' Jesus said- He spent time getting in tune with the will of the Father, and we need to do the same.
- **'For you have not travelled this way before'**- they had experienced a certain amount of God's provision in the wilderness, manna, quail and water from the rock as well as seeing the cloud of His presence, but now they were entering into a whole new level of trust in the power and presence of God. The ark symbolised the presence of God- the **presence of God brings about the miracle**- when the ark was in the river the miracle happened and when the ark left the miracle stopped. When Jesus appears on the scene things happen- the sick get healed, the dead are raised- we carry the presence of Jesus- He is in us by His Spirit, and we are in Him. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit more and more we will experience the supernatural power of God more and more- give space for God to move.
- They were also now entering into a new **phase of conflict**. They were entering into conflict with the enemy and had to take enemy ground, for this they would need to keep their focus on God. How often do we take our eyes off God when the enemy comes against us, and we feel defeated, demoralised and depressed? These are the very times we need to keep our focus on God- in the time of battle. Satan will try anything to get us to take our gaze off Jesus. Are you in such a time now? Re-focus on God, submit to God (first submit your gaze to God) and resist the devil and he will flee from you.
- **The priests led the way. Leadership is Biblical**, the people followed their spiritual leaders, the priests led the way, even the leaders of the army went through the camp and commanded everyone to follow the priests. When the Israelites grumbled previously against their leaders God saw it as a grumbling against Him, because Moses was trying to get the people to follow God. Miriam grumbled against Moses and leprosy broke out on her, she then repented and God healed her. Leaders have faults, even Moses, but a key characteristic of a person who wants to resist the will of God in their lives is a resistance to godly leadership. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not

with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:17) Let's thank God for our leaders, pray for them, let's also be diligent and faithful in leading within the areas God has allocated to us, for we all have leadership responsibilities in some areas as we grow in Christ, a key area being the responsibility to lead others to Christ.

### **They Made Public God's Works**

- The power of the sign- God speaks through signs. Isaiah's children had names relating to prophetic messages he had given to Israel, they became signs or signposts pointing to God's messages. As these things came true people would look at his children and remember what Isaiah predicted. Our lives are also signs, living letters pointing to Jesus- the way we live, the message we bring should point to the reality of God. We carry Christ's aroma about us- Eau de Christos. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. (2 Cor 2:15-16). The aroma of Christ means different things to different people depending on whether they are coming to God or trying to run from Him.
- Likewise, this sign of the opening of the Jordan river was a sign which meant 2 things:
  1. It would magnify Joshua's leadership in the sight of the Israelites- this was a supernatural miracle which put Joshua's leadership on a par with Moses. People would realise that God was working through this man. People need to not only hear the gospel, but see it. As we are willing to not only tell people about Jesus but also pray for their needs, heal them in Jesus' name and get spiritual insights and prophecy relevant to their lives so they will realise the same God of Moses is with us too, that He is real, and they can know Him.
  - 2a. It would make the hearts of the Canaanites sink because they would realise that God really was with the Israelites and the day of judgement had come against their sins. The Red Sea sign had been told to the Canaanites and their hearts really had sunk previously (if only someone had told the 10 disbelieving spies this previously!)
  - 2b. It would encourage Israel that God was really with them and He really had given them the land
- There are many signs happening today which point to something- the return of Christ. Jesus spoke about an increase of wars, famines, earthquakes and changes to the tides- these are not the end but are like birth pains when a woman goes into labour, the baby is still yet to be born. Another sign Jesus gave was the gospel being preached to all nations and all nations persecuting the Church. One of the last signs to come to this earth will be a complete shaking of the heavenly bodies (i.e. planets and stars), and the last sign will be the sign of the Son of Man (Jesus) appearing in the sky for all to see. This sign will cause great joy for those being saved but horror for those who have rebelled against God.
- Double memorial- we are to remember and tell of God's great deeds. 12 stones set up on land (1 for each of the 12 tribes, by a man from that tribe); and 12 stones set up in the middle of the river Jordan by Joshua himself to show where the priests had stood.
- Making a memorial- The importance of testimonial- next generation hear the stories. Sowing seeds for the next generation (God is always thinking about the children- passover meal 'why is this night different from any other night?')- Jesus and the children.
- Jesus has made us 'witnesses'- we have a first hand testimonial of Christ, which we can choose to bury into the ground or multiply (see parable of talents).
- Testimony is part of our worship- telling of His wonders. Is evangelistic. Is educational. Is FAITH BUILDING & encouraging to others- instills a culture of faith. Kings Arms in Bedford regularly putting testimonies on their website, following

Bethel's example.

**Conclusion**

- Dedication
- Crossing over
- Following God's lead
- Making public

**Song:**