

Enter at Your Own Rest

Studies in the Book of Joshua

"Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it"

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 3:1-17

Topic

The tribes of Israel cross over on dry ground as the priests bear the Ark of the Lord into the Jordan River

Title

"Raisers of the Lord's Ark"

Joshua 3:1 Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.

Joshua 3:2 So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp;

Joshua 3:3 and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.

Joshua 3:4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed *this* way before."

Joshua 3:5 And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

Joshua 3:6 Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

Joshua 3:7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day 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.

Joshua 3:8 You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.' "

Joshua 3:9 So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God."

Joshua 3:10 And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God *is* among you, and *that* He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites:

Joshua 3:11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan.

Joshua 3:12 Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe.

Joshua 3:13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, *that* the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."

Joshua 3:14 So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people,

Joshua 3:15 and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest),

Joshua 3:16 that the waters which came down from upstream stood *still, and* rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that *is* beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, *and* were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

Joshua 3:17 Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

Introduction

If you've lately flown commercially you've had to "hurry up and wait." The airline makes you arrive two hours early only to sit around waiting to board a flight that takes off late.

We don't like to hurry up and wait. It seems a waste of valuable time.

Which is why it surprised me to notice that the Lord had His people hurrying but waiting as they entered the Promised Land:

1. They were given three days to get ready to enter the land. After the three days Joshua said, **Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you** (3:5).
2. Once they began crossing they were described (in chapter four) as hurrying across.

3. But then, in chapter five, instead of attacking Jericho, all the adult males are circumcised and we're told that they **stayed in their places in the camp until they were healed** (5:8).

Turns out "hurry up and wait" can be a valuable use of time when it comes to walking with God. It can prepare us to overcome otherwise impossible obstacles in our walk with Him.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 If You Want To Overcome Obstacles You Need To Hurry Up And Wait, and #2 If You Want To Overcome Obstacles You Need To Hurry Up And Walk.

#1 If You Want To Overcome Obstacles You Need To Hurry Up And Wait (v1-5)

It was flood season. Estimates are that the Jordan River had swollen its banks and could be as much as a mile wide and one-hundred fifty feet deep. It would be impossible for the nearly two-million Israelites to cross with their women, children, livestock, and possessions.

We face impossible obstacles everyday. It could be a habitual sin... Or a temperament... Or some shame we bear. Often our pride is a swollen obstacle hindering our spiritual progress.

God wants us to get across our impossible obstacles. To do so we need to hurry up and wait. By that I mean we should make valuable use of the time we have to wait upon the Lord. Joshua did and we can learn from him.

Joshua 3:1 Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.

What do you suppose Joshua was doing **early in the morning**? He was spending alone-time with His Lord. There is no substitute for getting alone with God. It doesn't have to be in the morning but it can't be neglected if you want to cross over into His blessings.

Joshua 3:2 So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; **Joshua 3:3** and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.

The **ark of the covenant** is going to be mentioned ten times in chapter three and a total of sixteen times when we add chapter four. It was the physical dwelling place of the glory of God on earth among His people. It represented the very presence of God in their midst.

When I hurry up and wait on the Lord I am reminded of His presence in my life to lead me. He doesn't bring me to the shore of some swollen river and then train me how to swim through it as He watches me struggle from the shore. He goes ahead of me. He takes me through it. All I need do is know His empowering presence.

Joshua 3:4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed *this* way before."

They were to keep a distance of at least three thousand feet. The stated reason was that they might not get ahead of it but be content to follow wherever the ark led them.

We often find it hard to give God space to lead us. We get ahead of Him with our own plans and direction for our lives. Trouble is we get out in the middle of something and lose sight of what is really important – the joy of fellowship with Jesus. Our tasks become tedious burdens rather than blessings.

Joshua 3:5 And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

When the Israelites were told to **sanctify** themselves it usually meant bathing and putting on new, clean clothing. It was an outward representation of their inward condition.

We are to sanctify ourselves. We are to ready our hearts. It isn't to earn or deserve God's blessings. It is to be ready to receive them.

Look at it this way. If I am not willing to examine myself and confess my sin then I don't really care to see God's wonders, do I? I'm telling God I am content camped out next to my obstacle rather than wanting to conquer it.

God's people were waiting but the time was being valuably spent. Hurry up and wait for the Lord. Invest yourself in your devotions to get a sense of God's presence, of His leading. Sanctify yourself so He can do wonders in obliterating the obstacles you face.

#2 If You Want To Overcome Obstacles You Need To Hurry Up And Walk (v6-17)

Look ahead in chapter four to the end of verse ten:

Joshua 4:10 ... and the people hurried and crossed over.

There is a time for waiting upon the Lord and there is a time for walking with the Lord. Once waiting is done we should be in a hurry to follow Him through our obstacles.

Joshua 3:6 Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

Every Christian is a priest. If we are not waiting in private then we are walking in public. We should have a sense that people look to us to see Jesus lifted up.

Joshua 3:7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day 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.

Joshua 3:8 You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.' "

Forty years earlier Moses parted the Red Sea and the waters heaped-up on both sides. God would get the next generation across an equally impassable Jordan River but He would do it differently.

They would first have to get their feet wet and then He'd stop the waters far upstream.

Why does God do things differently? One reason is so we will remain dependant upon Him and not think we can do things on our own.

Joshua 3:9 So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God."

Joshua 3:10 And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God *is* among you, and *that* He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites:

Seven powerful enemies were waiting to engage God's people. They had been dug in to the land for four hundred years. They had fortified their cities and stored up their supplies.

Whatever you are facing God **will without fail drive it out**. You can be overcome or be an overcomer; a victim or a victor. The point we are emphasizing in our studies in Joshua is to go forward with God and conquer those enemies and obstacles that seem overwhelming.

Joshua 3:11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan.

Joshua 3:12 Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe.

We'll see in chapter four that these tribal representatives had a specific task to perform. They would gather twelve stones to set up as a memorial.

What I see for us is that every one of God's people was represented and thus every one of God's people was included. Overcoming obstacles and enemies is not for an elite few. It is for every believer in Jesus Christ.

Joshua 3:13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, *that* the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."

It sounds a little trite but you need to get your feet wet for God! You need to get up and get into the water. Walking with God is, after all, a walk of faith.

Why don't we see God doing wonders in our lives? Sometimes it's because we've gotten comfortable camping on the shores of our enemies. We don't want to get our feet wet!

Joshua 3:14 So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, **Joshua 3:15** and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), **Joshua 3:16** that the waters which came down from upstream stood *still, and* rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that *is* beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, *and* were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

Have you been struggling a long time with some trait or habit or sin? Maybe you are waiting for the waters to part before you step out. Maybe God instead wants you to start walking with Him, in obedience, and then He will stop the waters from flooding over you.

Joshua 3:17 Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

I love that it was **dry ground**. Not the muck and mud of a riverbed. There was nothing to get them bogged down.

Two million people walking one-thousand abreast would be about two-thousand deep and could cross in about an hour. Especially since we read in chapter four they **hurried** across.

Did they hurry from fear? I don't think so. They hurried from faith. Once they understood they were victors, not victims, and overcomers, not overcome, they hurried forward through the obstacle to take on their enemies.

You and I need to be in more of a hurry in our walk. We've no time to waste once we have direction and leading from the Lord.

Do you have a life-dominating sin? A trait of temperament you've grown comfortable with? Some habit that is less than spiritual? If so you need to be in a hurry to overcome it.

You hurry up and wait on the Lord in order to hurry up in your walk overcoming obstacles and conquering enemies.

One final picture from or text. We read that *the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan* (v16). Adam was the name of a city some archaeologists identify today as Tell Adamiyeh.

But it also has a spiritual significance. Everything we are talking about in gaining victory over obstacles and enemies is represented in the mention of the city.

From a spiritual standpoint, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, stepped in to the flood waters of God's judgment against the sin of mankind. Those waters rolled over Him as He died on the Cross at Calvary. But He came up out of the waters! He rose from the dead victorious over sin and death. It is because of His resurrection life that we can have our life and victory as overcomers.

You might say that Jesus rolled back the waters of God's judgment all the way to Adam, the first man, and his sin which brought God's judgment upon the human race.

All who so choose can walk across on dry ground and be saved from judgment.

And those who have, those of us who are Christians, can then go on experiencing His power as we wait then walk with Jesus.