

Overcoming Our Obstacles

Joshua 3:1-3:17

Introduction:

Because of their unbelief, Israel was sentenced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Those years have now expired and the children of Israel are poised to enter into Canaan Land. They are ready to claim their inheritance in the land of promise. However, before they can enter Canaan, they must first get past one final, major obstacle: the Jordan River. Normally, this would not have presented much of a problem, since the Jordan was only 100 feet wide at Gilgal where they crossed. However, it seems that God always does things in such a way that no man can boast of having done them on their own. This crossing would be no exception. Read Joshua 3:15a: "Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest."

God brought them to the Jordan River at the time of harvest! Those who have been there during the harvest time know that at Gilgal the Jordan swells to an impassable width of almost one mile. It was over almost 20 times wider than it normally would have been when Israel arrived. There was no way they could cross this river on their own! They needed supernatural help.

Today you must understand that every one of us will face Jordans in our life from time to time! When we look at the obstacles that stand between us and spiritual victory in our own Canaan Conquest, we may feel that we will never be able to enter into victory! While I do not know what kind of obstacles that you face in your life, I do know the God who specializes in overcoming the overwhelming and in leading His children to victory.

This morning, I want us to examine how we face the Jordans in our life and learn the spiritual principles that enable us to overcome instead of being overwhelmed. Here is some encouragement for you today: what worked for Israel over 3000 years ago will still work for you and me today. In chapters 3 & 4 WE WILL LEARN THREE POWERFUL PRINCIPLES we must follow if we are to live in the Land of Promise and Overcome our Obstacles.

I. A MESSAGE TO EXAMINE (3:1-13)

In this first principle it is imperative that we realize God has a very important and very direct message that each of us must examine if we are to successfully cross the Jordans in our life and experience the Canaan Conquest. This message can be easily understood by realizing it involves a challenge, a command and a commitment!

A. THE CHALLENGE (3:1-4)

"Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went

to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. 2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 3 giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. 4 Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it." (3:1-4)

To overcome the obstacles in our life we need to understand God's challenge in His message to us. His challenge involves our commitment to...

- WATCH GOD - "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God..." (3:2b)

Notice the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned 7 times in chapter 3. The Ark was the special piece of Tabernacle furniture that symbolized the presence and power of God. When the Ark was in the Holy of Holies, the glory of God rested upon it and it was the dwelling place of God. To Israel, the ARK of the COVENANT represented God's presence in the midst of His people. In other words, when God moved, they were to move. When God stopped they stopped. They were to watch the Ark of the Covenant!

There is a valuable spiritual lesson for us here. In times of crisis, or when we need direction in life we must be sensitive to the activity of the Lord in and around us. It is a fact that God loves you and He will show you what He is doing! "Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does. Yes, to your amazement He will show Him even greater things than these." John 5:19-20

If you will discipline your life to watch Him, He will teach you how to live day by day.

- FOLLOW GOD - "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it." (3:2)

When the Ark of the Covenant moves the message is clear: "...you are to move out from your positions and follow it." Not only were they to watch God, they were to actively pursue God and follow Him!

It isn't enough to know what God is doing, there comes a time when you must "move out from your position and follow Him." This may require us to leave our comfort zone! Israel was about to follow the Ark through a river that was almost a mile wide! That couldn't have been easy, but it was right! Following God may not be the easiest thing you will ever do, but it will be the best thing you ever do. If you ever expect to overcome your obstacles and enter your land of promise you must learn to follow God. The third part of the challenge in this message is to...

- HONOR GOD - "Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between

you and the ark; do not go near it." (3:4)

Notice the Israelites are told to stay at least a thousand yards or 3000 feet behind the Ark. The reason is two-fold: They could easily see what was happening ahead of them and; secondly, the Lord wanted no one but the Levites near the Ark. To get too close would have meant death.

There is a lesson here for us. We must never be guilty of treating God with anything but the respect He deserves. There must always be a holy reverence in our hearts. God help us to never allow a spirit of familiarity to cheapen or walk with the Lord.

Simply put, these three parts of this challenge in our message are most easily accomplished by learning to walk in the Spirit.

REVIEW: THE MESSAGE INVOLVED THE CHALLENGE TO: WATCH, FOLLOW and HONOR GOD. Also, this message issued:

B. THE COMMAND (3:5)

"Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." (3:5)

Listen carefully to the command in this message: Consecrate means to insure that you are as clean and holy before you face the overwhelming obstacle in your life. They were to put away anything that was displeasing to the Lord. They were to examine themselves and get ready for the Lord to do something great for them. We will never cross the JORDANS in our life if we fail to and examine our life and insure that we are clean and ready for God to work with us and through us. Remember the instructions Paul gave to all Christians prior to taking communion: "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." (1 Corinthians 11:27-29) It may very well be that you are overcome by the obstacles in your life simply because you have failed to take time to examine your life in light of this directive!

c. THE COMMITMENT – (3:9-13)

"Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10 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. 11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. 12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 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." Joshua 3:9-13 (NIV)

This message to the Israelites reminded them that getting across the Jordan did not rest in their strength, but in the Lord's; IT WAS HIS COMMITMENT TO THEM. It was His plan to get them over and it was His problem. God commits Himself to

bringing His people across their Jordan! All that was required of Israel was that they trust God!

May I remind you that things have not changed? If God could be trusted in those days to keep His promises, then He can still be trusted today! Often, we are unable to get past the obstacles in our lives because of our deep lack of faith in the promises of God! How do I know? Because, tragically, it's often the worry and doubt that marks the lives of God's people.

- We worry about tomorrow: But the Lord said: "Do not worry about tomorrow..." Matt. 6:34.
- We worry about material things: But the Lord promised: "Seek first my kingdom and all these things will be added unto you." Matt. 6:33; Phil. 4:19.
- We worry about the possessions: But God said, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Heb. 13:5
- We worry about everything: But God said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:6-7

The bottom line: Jesus is all-powerful, all-knowing and He is all-present. He knows what you are going through. He knows everything there is to know about it. He reminds all of us...

"The righteous will live by faith." Rom. 1:17

"...Everything that does not come from faith is sin." Rom. 14:23

HERE IS THE MESSAGE YOU NEED TO HEAR THIS MORNING IF YOU ARE GOING TO OVERCOME WHATEVER OBSTACLE YOU FACE TODAY:

The Lord is greater than any problem we have ever or will ever face in life. We need to remember that what the Lord has promised to do, He will accomplish! "Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." Rom. 4:21 Let's take his message to heart! REVIEW: I. A MESSAGE TO EXAMINE.

II. A MIRACLE TO EXPECT (3:14-17)

Once we have examined the message then we have every right to expect the miracle. However, we should remember that when overcoming our obstacles, EVERY PROBLEM IS NOTHING MORE THAN A PLATFORM FOR GOD TO WORK A MIRACLE IN OUR LIFE! Look at v.15a

"Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest." (3:15a)

Obviously, the children of Israel were facing a big problem. The river was over almost a mile wide and there were 2 million people who had to cross, and yet the Lord wanted them to go over. They couldn't build a bridge; there wasn't enough time or materials. They couldn't transport everyone over in boats; there were no boats and they would have been sitting ducks for their enemies. There was only one way around their problem and that was through it!

Have you ever sized up your problem and thought: "There is no way around, through, over or past this problem." I suppose we have all been like the 10 spies that returned from spying out the land of Canaan with Caleb and Joshua. We have sized up our problem and think that it is more than we can ever face! Our real problem is the same one we always have when we face a difficult situation: we forget about God! Where we only see the problem, God only sees the solution. We look at the situation and say, "There's no way!" God looks at the same problem and says, "Follow me, I have a plan!"

WHAT WAS GOD'S PLAN? "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. 16 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 Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho." (3:15-16) God's Plan: "When the feet of the priests enter Jordan, I am going to part the waters and lead you through on the dry ground!" There was a catch or condition to God's plan: the waters would not part until the priests who were carrying the Ark stepped into the water. In other words, it took a step of faith where the people obediently followed the Lord for them to see the miracle come to pass. (TALK ABOUT FORWARD BY FAITH MIRACLE)

What is the truth for us today? Too often, we want the Lord just to fix everything in our lives for us. We don't want to have to make any decisions nor do we want to have to exercise our faith in Him. We just want Him to do it and that will be the end of it. However, most of the time, God will require us to take steps of faith in order that we might see our Jordan parted. God had a plan, but for this plan to work, it required faith on the part of His people! The same is true for you and me! As long as we are trying to solve our own problems we are not walking in faith! It never is about what we can do, it is always about what the Lord is able to do through us as we respond to Him by faith! "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us." Eph. 3:20

Did God's people live in obedience to this plan as they faced their problem? Absolutely, and the miracle of overcoming the overwhelming obstacle is amazing. Examine 3:16-17: "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 Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 The priests 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." (Joshua 3:16-17)

When the priests obediently stepped into that raging river, it parted and God opened a path of dry ground through the waters for His people. By the way, verse 16 says that the waters backed up to the City of Adam. This is some 20 miles north of where the children of Israel were crossing. God made a path through their Jordan that was more than adequate for His people.

We must remember that faith honors God and God honors faith! I want to encourage you this morning by reminding you that what God did for Israel is the same God we are serving this morning! What He did for them, He can do now. He was ABLE all through the Bible, and He is still ABLE today! Regardless of the circumstances, God is able to overcome your most overwhelming obstacle. Just ask, Noah, Moses, Daniel, the 3 Hebrews, Rahab, the Disciples on a little boat, and Saul of Tarsus. Just look back over your own life. How many times has the Lord opened your Jordan already? He is all we need! So remember, if you are facing a Jordan in your life today then let's review: I. There is a message to examine; II. There is a miracle to expect; and finally there is...

CONCLUSION:

Many of you are facing troubled waters this morning; you are looking at an obstacle that is overwhelming and I want to remind you that when you trust Him and follow His leadership, you can cross over; you can overcome your JORDAN.

I invite you to come before the Lord this morning at this altar and tell Him about the Jordan you are facing and allow Him to get you past it today. There is a place of victory that is waiting for you. It is your own Promised Land; it is your very own Canaan Conquest. The first step in getting there is dealing with what is keeping you out: your own Jordan. It may sin, it may be some person, it may be some trial, but whatever it is, God is greater than it is. Come and let Him take care of it for you!