

"We've Never Been This Way Before"

Joshua 3

For many people on a practical level, Labour Day weekend seems like the beginning of a new year. Summer is over, it's the start or return to school, work, sports and while some of this is a return to familiar territory, other times it's the start of something new. A change from elementary to high school or high school to post secondary education and your leaving the familiar for uncharted territory. You're worried, a little anxious. How will we get through this? We've never done this before? How will I pay for school? How will I make my own food, do my own laundry, get my own internet? And how does the bus system work? Are there any good churches close by? Are there any other Christians here?

Adults too. Maybe your just as anxious for your kids as they are (maybe more so). Our kids are no longer little. They are high schoolers! We're the parents of college/university kids! Or, we're going to be empty nesters! Are we ready for these changes? Maybe you're going back to school as an adult and you had to quit your job and you're anxious about how you'll do, how will we pay the bills? This is foreign territory for us. I feel like an alien in this new environment where before, almost everyone knew me. And now no one knows me. We've never been this way before; how will we get through this?

We've been talking this year about 'aliens and strangers' a lot because our theme is 'Citizens of Heaven'. As a believer in Jesus Christ, Paul says in Phil. 3:20,

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

An alien and stranger is one who belongs somewhere else but temporarily lives in foreign territory. In the Law of Moses God told the Israelites they will be foreigners and strangers in Egypt for 400 years. When God took them out under Moses' leadership there were a number of times they wanted to go back. Why? Because it was familiar. It was hard but they had food, water and a place to sleep. In the wilderness they were homeless for another 40 years, living in tents, moving a lot. We don't like change.

Surprisingly, they got used to wilderness life just as we all get used to whatever the 'new normal' is. What about when they sit on the east side of the Jordan finally waiting to go into the Promised Land. God knew their concerns. So He says in Joshua 3:3-4

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.

The central focus in Joshua 3-4 is trust the Word of God and watch God go ahead of you. The Ark of the Covenant was the symbolic presence of God. He's going before you. The crossing of the Jordan promises a great lesson for us whenever we're facing new challenges, new experiences in life. We're having our first child, we've never done this before. We're moving away from our family and friends for the first time. We just lost our job. We're retiring. My parents are now deceased or we just lost a family member too soon. We've never been this way before. God says 'I am with You. I will

go ahead of you because you've never been this way before. So what can we learn about life's challenges as we study Israel's crossing the Jordan?

Trust God; He's Led Us to Where We Are Now **(3:1-2)**

V.1 tells the reader we are in Shittim. Shittim or Abel Shittim (sometimes called) is appx 20 km to Jericho, both being about 10 km from the Jordan (Shittim east of the Jordan). The Israelites have been in this area since Num. 25. God has gotten them this far. They are now on the edge of the land of Canaan, the land God promised them. They have even moved closer to the Jordan and have been there for 3 days. Doing what? Waiting on God.

God said He would get them there and He has. He has been with them all the way. It's taken this long not because God got lost but because Israel failed to trust God. If we fail to trust God along our own life's journey, there will be delays to where God wants to get us.

God has promised Joshua that He will exalt him as He did Moses. Joshua and Caleb have been there since they left Egypt. No other man over 60 is there. Every man 20 and older who failed to trust God and the report Joshua and Caleb gave in Num. 13 has died in the wilderness. God has commanded Joshua to be 'strong and courageous' and be careful to obey all the Words God has given them' (Ch. 1). Which he has done so far. The people have complied also.

God got them there. He fed them manna every day. He miraculously provided water at times and even quail. He had spoken to Moses numerous times, settled disagreements in visible ways (rebellion of Korah, complaint of Aaron and Miriam) and shown Himself every day through cloud by day and fire by night. As Moses writes in the beginning of Deuteronomy he lists all the places God has led them. You haven't arrived where you are without God's help.

And we can say the same of course. None of us are where we are today without God's leading. Some of us could be elsewhere or have grown more had we trusted God. Some of you might be stuck in your spiritual life because you refuse to obey God in some area. God hasn't left us, He's been with us all the way even when we did not recognize His leading or wanted to obey His leading. So trust God because He has a very good track record. If you're anxious about the future because you've haven't been that way yet, trust God; He's going ahead of you.

All this began in Ch. 1 where God reassured Joshua He would be with him as He was with Moses. Back in 1:11 Joshua told the officers to tell the people,

Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

And now he repeats that in Ch. 3:3

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."

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

God was going to do amazing things for the Israelites but they had to be ready. What does consecrate mean?

Love God; Prepare Yourself to Follow Him **(3:3-5)**

God intentionally communicates in the same language what He said to Moses at the exodus events. In Ex. 19:10 He told Moses to tell the people before giving them the Law.

Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes ¹¹ 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. ¹² Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.

“Consecrate” is the Hebrew word Qadosh – be holy. God required Israel’s focus; wash your clothes symbolically as a reminder of your need to wash out the impurities in your life. Confess sin, right the wrongs, heal broken relationships. There’s a time to enjoy life’s blessings but not at this moment. Pray, fast, read God’s Word. Why? Because God’s going to do amazing things and we might not always see God’s hand because we are distracted by good things in life and sin that trips us up. You haven’t been this way, God says; I’m going ahead for you but I want you to be spiritually alert and see how I’m going to get you to where I want you.

As parents and grandparents, we know how true this is. We pray for our kids and grandkids that God would go before them as they start a new challenge in their life. We hear back how things went and we recognize God is with them; He was already preparing things ahead of time for them. We’ve seen it in our own lives where we had a difficulty or a new life experience and we prayed asking God to show us where He’s working – and He does! Which strengthens our faith.

There are times when we need to consecrate ourselves more closely to God when we’re unsure of His leading but that won’t happen if its not already a part of our life. To pray regularly, to listen consistently to His Word and

Believe God Can Do the Impossible **(3:6-8, 11-17)**

If the people were unsure of how they were going to get across, now God made it clear. God says the priests will carry the Ark and everyone will follow them at a distance according to the organizational movements God laid out back in Numbers. God will cross first (v.11) and as soon as the priests put their feet in the water, the waters will part and the flow of the Jordan will be stopped way back in a town called Adam 18 miles north – and yes, God says this is the spring and its flood season! And that’s exactly what happened. The priests walked into the water, the water stopped flowing and was pushed back up stream and the ground was dry. Just like another time 40 years earlier.

Normally the Jordan is about 40’ at its widest and 6’ at its deepest. But this time of year can see the Jordan grow to 100’ and 10’ deep. And the Jordan moves faster the more south you go. This is humanly impossible but with God nothing is impossible.

When we trust Him to go before us in our life experiences, seeking to follow Him by staying close to Him spiritually, believing and watching for God to work what results is

We Will Know God More Through This **(3:9-10)**

God told us this back in vv.9-10.

⁹Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰This 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.

Do we want to know that the Living God is with us and that He will one day remove all those who oppose Him and us?

Trust His Words are true and depend on them for your life. Love Him more by drawing closer to Him and farther from yourself. Believe He will make a way when humanly speaking we can't see a solution. This is how we grow in God. *"Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰This is how you will know that the living God is among you.*

And what is it that we're going to know and see?

God will meet our needs (5:10-12)

Ch. 4 is all about a memorial the Israelites mark the Jordan River crossing, which we'll comment on in Communion. In Ch. 5:1-9, they get to the other side and God says, you need to circumcise the men who weren't circumcised yet. That puts Israel at a significant disadvantage if the people in Canaan want to attack them. But they won't because this incident caused all the kings in Canaan to fear Him (5:1).

their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.

So God protected them as they obeyed His words.

He also did something else. We read in 5:10

¹⁰On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. ¹¹The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. ¹²The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

No more manna was needed. God met their needs for 40 years through manna and once they did what He said and crossed over, God said new menu. Enjoy the blessings of the land. How often has God met our needs when we've had to trust Him? Over and over and over. And we still doubt at times.

What else does God do for His people when we trust Him, love Him, believe in Him to do the impossible?

He removes the obstacles in our path (6:15-27)

The walls of Jericho fall because they followed the Ark again. Ch. 6 was not as strange as we think. They already followed the Ark through the Jordan River. Miracle. Now God says follow Me and the Ark for 7 days. Do nothing for the first 6 days, then on the 7th day shout. Another miracle. Jericho stood in Israel's way to move into the land. God removed that obstacle. Another humanly impossible task.

And how did this all start?

When God's people step out in faith (3:14-17)

None of this would have happened had the priests not taken a step of faith and then everyone else stepping out in faith to cross the Jordan on dry ground.

Sometimes I hear Christians spiritually paralyze themselves when looking for God's direction. They have a decision to make, they are unsure where to go or what to do. They act like Gideon looking for signs from God and try to interpret the normal everyday events of life as divine signposts. Meanwhile God is saying, step out in faith in one of those directions and I will show you if that is right or wrong. Put a offer on that house and see. Apply for that job or school and watch God show you. Ask that person that question that's paralyzing you with fear. Trust God to show you. Yes, we're afraid because we haven't been that way before. But God is already there. He's with us. He won't forsake us. Trust Him, love Him, believe Him and watch Him work in your life.

* * * * *

If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net