

Crossing the Jordan

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev D.Macpherson

[0 : 00] Joshua and chapter 3. The verse that I want to focus in on, although not right from the very beginning, but certainly read this verse, is verse 5.

We read Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you. So the prospect of the Lord doing wonders, of the Lord doing amazing things, does that excite you?

Is that something that you say, well that's what I would like. I would like to see that. Here in our own congregation, we want to see the Lord doing wonderful things. First of all, does it excite you?

Or do you say, well I'm really quite comfortable the way I am, things are okay. Wonderful things can be uncomfortable as well, it brings change and new people and maybe there's even a sense of being a little uncomfortable with that notion.

I hope not. I hope rather your response is yes, that is precisely what I want to see. I want to see wonderful things, the Lord doing wonderful things. I don't want to just read about it in books from past centuries.

[1 : 13] I don't just want to read about it in magazines about other countries and other lands. Good as that is. And we're part of that because they too are part of the family of God. But nonetheless, the verse here speaks of wonders among you, among us.

And Joshua says, it's not just that you're going to hear about wonderful things, not just that I'm going to tell you about wonderful things, but you yourselves will experience, will be part of the Lord doing wonders, of the Lord doing amazing things.

Now how can that be? I don't think there's any formula. God isn't like some kind of slot machine in the sky, that if you put in the right coins and the right amount of money, well then whatever you want will come, whether it be wonders, or whether it be healing, or whether it be blessing, or whether it be this, or that, or the next thing.

It doesn't work like that. And yet, we can surely learn from the experience of God's people in times past, in our own history, and perhaps particularly as we turn to the word of God and the history of the people of Israel.

And we want to look at this particular incident and how it was that these were the people prepared for the Lord doing wonders among them. Just very briefly, if we note the background that brings us to this point in history.

[2 : 41] Moses, as we know, led the people out of Egypt. And within a year or so, they were on the brink of entering the Promised Land.

You remember the time when the twelve spies went out and they came back with the reports and Joshua and Caleb said, yes, it's a wonderful land, let's go and take possession. And the other time said, no, there's giants in that land.

We can't go there. And the people sided with the majority. Not always a wise thing to do. And they held back. And the consequences were terrible consequences.

They ended up spending the next 40 years or so wandering in the desert. I want to come back to that incident to compare it to what we have here a little further on. But time has indeed moved on. And now we are at the point when they really are about to enter the Promised Land. They really are on the verge of crossing the Jordan. They're on the verge of seeing and of experiencing wonderful things, amazing things.

[3 : 42] And as we think of this incident and as we try to draw lessons for ourselves, that we too would be a prepared people for the Lord working amongst us.

What can we note? Well, I want to note this three things. First of all, we have here a prepared people. A prepared people. A people prepared for the Lord doing these amazing things.

So I also want to notice, and that is the focus of verse 5, that there was a particular requirement. That's the words of Joshua, sanctify yourselves for tomorrow.

A prepared people, a particular requirement. And then we'll notice just briefly that all of this was for a very glorious purpose. first of all, though, a prepared people.

In what sense were the people of God, were the people of Israel prepared at this particular point for the Lord doing wonders amongst them? The one thing that does come across very clearly in this chapter is that the people at this point were very united.

[4 : 51] That hadn't always been a feature. We've already noticed how on the first occasion that the spies went, they weren't united. That was the problem. But here we find them united of one mind. There in verse 1 of chapter 3, Joshua rose early in the morning and they removed from Shittim and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel.

All the children of Israel going together to the banks of the Jordan ready to cross. This unity was a unity in action. they were moving together towards Jordan.

We maybe sometimes make the mistake of thinking that unity is simply the absence of division. Just like we might say that peace is the absence of war but it's more than that.

Unity isn't simply the absence of division. I think as a congregation we recognize and we thank God for the fact that we enjoy a great measure of unity.

And perhaps what we mean by that is well there aren't groups here and there maybe backstabbing or sniping or saying well we shouldn't be going in this direction we should be going that way we shouldn't be doing this we should be doing that.

[6 : 00] We thankfully don't have that and we thank God for it and so we say we're united. And yes in a measure but the unity that we have here is a unity in action where everybody is moving forward together.

It's not the unity of somebody who sits on the sidelines and says I'm right behind you I'm right behind you you go for it you do what needs to be done I'm right behind you Kirk Session in all your plans in your evangelism that's good I'm right behind you that's the way forward I will walk I certainly won't criticize I certainly won't say that it's the wrong way forward or nothing of that sort but I'll simply watch from the sidelines.

You see that isn't the unity that we have here here all the people are going forward with Joshua to the banks of the Jordan and when you think of the historic situation you could very well have had the kind of situation I'm painting remember there was the Reubenites and the Gadites they had decided to stay east of the Jordan they had seen the land there and they said well we're going to stay here I don't think they should have because that wasn't really their place but nonetheless that's what they decided and they could well have said to Joshua well Joshua we're right behind you you go for it you cross the Jordan you defeat these pagan nations we're right behind you but we're happy here we're just going to stay here but they didn't they said we're going to come with you we'll come with you and until the victory is won we will be with you then we'll return to the lands that we've decided to occupy you see there was a unity in action together and moving forward and that's the kind of unity that we should know and so we must examine ourselves and see if we are part of them if we are part of a congregation who says yes

I am also moving forward and seeking to do what God would have us do in this place and in this community they were united united in action united also in faith how do we know the measure of their faith as a people the best way really of measuring their faith is to see what they do and of course that's true to this day you know some people are very good at speaking and as they speak and tell you perhaps of their faith because they're very good at speaking you might say what great faith and yet the real measure is what they do the way they live other people maybe aren't very good at speaking and if they were to describe to you their faith you might say well there's not much faith there but then if you see the way they live then you say ah yes here is one a man of faith a woman of faith well let's look at what these people actually do to discover the measure of their faith well they head out into the unknown in verse 4 they're told yet shall there be a space between you and it that is the ark about 2,000 cubits by measure come not near to it that you may know the way by which you must go for you have not passed this way heretofore you see they were heading into the unknown this was uncharted territory where Joshua was telling them to go they had not been before and there's no doubt the natural fear of the unknown something that

I'm sure most of us can sympathize with we find it difficult to do something we've never done before to go somewhere we've never been before some more than others depending maybe on the type of

person that you are but the unknown always holds a certain fear for us and these people they have to go to a place where they had never been before and they had to go to the banks of the river Jordan still ignorant because as yet they had not been told as to how they were to cross you see you may have seen the rather strange instruction that Joshua was giving them he didn't say now you go to the banks and the waters will separate they haven't been told this yet they were simply told you go to the banks of the Jordan you just do what I instruct you to do and they knew of course that the instructions Joshua gave were the instructions that he first had received from God and so they go to the Jordan the Jordan that we're told that was in full flood in verse 15 it says as they bear the ark were come unto Jordan and the feet of the priests that bear the ark were dipped in the brim of the water and then we have for Jordan overflows all his banks all the time of harvest and so the Jordan was in full flow as it were and no prospect of a whole people women and children and all their animals and all their goods and no prospect of them being able to cross this river and yet they go they go in unknown territory they go unaware as yet as to how certain obstacles are to be overcome but they go and what about you and what about me and what about us as a congregation are we prepared to go into uncharted territory to go and to do that which perhaps we haven't done before but which we know is needful to be done to reach those we haven't been able to reach before maybe you as an individual to take on some form of

[11 : 26] Christian service that you've never done before and it's new and it's frightening in a sense and you say well I've never done that I've never experienced that I don't know how good I would be at it it sounds very difficult and it sounds something that will have many obstacles in the way and I don't know if I'd be able to overcome them and what God says is you go you start you launch out and as you do so so the strength will be given as you do so so the obstacles will be overcome we need to launch out and trust that God will provide a way forward it's an interesting point almost a curious but a very interesting point that the priest had to actually put their feet in the water before the waters would stand up in a heap as it's described in the AD there in verse 13 it says and it shall come to pass as soon as the soles of the feet of the priest that bear the ark of the Lord the Lord of all the earth shall rest in the waters of Jordan then the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above and they shall stand upon a heap you see the priest had to go right in had to right in and get their feet wet before the river would separate

I wonder if any of these priests I can't imagine that they were all enjoyed any equal measure of faith I wonder if any of them maybe felt almost a little foolish or maybe they felt a little afraid well what are we doing here we're going to go right into the water it's the huge river we have to actually step in that's what was needful they had to go right as far as that point before God would say yes here are the people who have launched out in faith here are the people who are worthy of seeing great things being done in their midst here are the people who have obeyed me to the letter now I will show them what a God I am now I will show them the wonders that I will do amongst the men to get right in right into the water before the waters separated to allow them to pass on dry ground they were united in faith together I wonder why they enjoyed such faith no doubt for some of them there was the help that comes from a previous experience of God you see the older ones amongst them those that would have been over say roughly 58 because remember that when they failed to take possession of the promised land the first time round

God had said that all those over 20 would die in the wilderness before they eventually did take possession those under 20 would survive and so at this point there would have been those 58 or so and above who would have remembered would have been present on the occasion when they passed the Red Sea and of course Joshua and Caleb also and they had seen a wonder like this one a similar wonder being done and maybe for them it was a little bit more easy they'd seen God work in this way but for the rest it was all simply by word of mouth and maybe in a measure that helped them to believe that God would do such a wonder but I think rather the reason for their confidence is at least in a measure perhaps in great measure that these were a people united also under a faithful leader they were united under one who set the lead who set the tone for the kind of faith that the whole people were able to demonstrate you see

Joshua was one to whom the people could look and they could say well this man has a great God this is a man who really believes that God is going to do great things and there's a contagious element I'm not saying that we can get faith simply by observing one who has but nonetheless I have no doubt that the leadership the faithful leadership of Joshua in great measure was one that gave the people that confidence to believe that God would indeed do great things amongst them

what kind of faithful leader was he well he was a leader who pointed the people to God he didn't point to himself he didn't say look at me trust me so I won't let you down he said look to God he won't let you down you see he said to the people you follow the ark of the covenant the ark will go forward before you the ark will be the one that will as it were set the scene and open the way for you and we know that the ark of the covenant was the symbol of God's presence to set the ark at the front of the multitude was to set

God at the front of the multitude was to recognize that it was God who was going to open the way for them and so Joshua points the people to God and what kind of God does he point them to well he tells them that in verse 10 you will know that the living God is among you and then in verse 11 he says behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan he points them to God and what a God he points them to he says this God who is going to open the way for you he is none other than the living God he is none other than the Lord of all the earth this is no local deity this is no national God whose remit doesn't extend beyond our national border no this is a God who is the Lord of all the earth what a God he points them to and he is a leader also who followed God's instructions

[17:20] God gave the instructions we see in chapter 1 of Joshua instructions being given and also as we read through these early chapters the Lord is constantly speaking with Joshua and saying this is the way you are to do it this is the way you are to go and Joshua follows those instructions that's the kind of leadership that he gave to the people also in great detail there in verse 4 we have the manner in which they were to follow the ark and the very measurements that are given the distance that there was to be between the ark and the people Joshua doesn't say well why 2,000 cubits seems an awful long way or too short a way he says well that's the way it's got to be that's the way it will be and in chapter 4 we didn't read it but it speaks of the memorial that was to be built up the stones that were to be gathered and so on and Joshua follows these instructions to the letter he is a leader who points the people to God he is a leader who does things

God's way and that must always be something that we must take care to do it's all very well to think of great plans that we might do as a congregation but let us always be rooted in God's word to ensure that what we do is being done in God's way not as we see fit not as we might consider useful or successful but doing things in God's way we follow God's instructions and the leadership also and this extends not only to Joshua but also to the leadership team as it were including the priests and other leaders they were leaders who led from the front but also from behind and what do I mean by that you see in verse 3 we find that the priests had to carry the ark before the people and so they go in front for the people to follow and they say well that's the way it should be a leader must lead from the front but it's also interesting that these same leaders are also leading from behind in the sense that they remain in the midst of

Jordan until all the people have passed through you know it's no use of having a leader who leads from the front so far in front that nobody can follow maybe a few can manage to keep up and keep the pace and then many others struggling behind and being lost in the distance you see here are leaders who lead from the front certainly the people know where to go because they're following the leaders but even those who are right behind the weaker ones the older ones the younger ones who are right at the back of the thousands across they know that there in the middle the leaders remain until all have passed and then they come up behind them they're almost enveloping them leading all around making sure that everybody's involved that nobody's left out that nobody falls behind now isn't that a beautiful picture of the way as a congregation and as those of us who are given leadership should lead and it is maybe a sobering picture you see maybe we like to go forward and to be way up in front and say well come on keep up but are we prepared to be up behind there and see those who are struggling see those who are falling behind and making sure that they cross Jordan also making sure that they're not left so far behind that they lose heart you see this is the way the leaders Joshua and the priests and those responsible ensure that the whole people crossed over that nobody was left behind that nobody was left out so they were united united in action united in faith and united under a faithful leader but then we come to the particular requirement and we will just think briefly of that particular requirement that was given to the people there in verse 5 Joshua said to the people sanctify yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you you see everything's set a prepared people they're on the banks of the Jordan you can say well nothing can go wrong now within 24 hours they'll be over the Jordan how could they possibly fail at this point but Joshua knew that even at this point it was possible to snatch

defeat from the jaws of victory he knew that even at this point were the people not to be consecrated that even at this point things could still go horribly wrong he knew that at this point especially it was necessary for the people each and every one to personally examine themselves and see if they were consecrated to the

Lord if they were sanctified to the Lord if they were committed personally to the Lord was enough for the people to ride piggyback on Joshua's face Joshua says to the people you go back to your tent you go back to where you are and you ask yourself the question am I committed am I committed to the Lord am I prepared to do what the Lord asks of me it was necessary for the people to sanctify themselves that on the morrow the Lord would do wonders among them and Joshua knew this from bitter experience go back just for a moment to his first experience of very nearly occupying the promised land remember then when he went as one of the twelve spies and he came back and he was full of enthusiasm he said to the people let's cross over let's take possession they were as on this occasion 24 hours away from taking possession of the land he said what could go wrong but things did go wrong why because the other ten spies says no chance and the people said no chance they weren't consecrated they weren't prepared to go and to do what

[23 : 01] God told them to do there's a wonderful verse in Numbers chapter 14 where Joshua was and Caleb were seeking to persuade the people concerning entry into the promised land and then in verse 8 of Numbers 14 we read if the Lord delight in us then he will bring us into this land and give it to us a land which flows with milk and honey if the Lord delight in us and isn't this just another way other language for what Joshua is telling the people now consecrate yourselves because what kind of people does the Lord delight in he delights in those who are consecrated to him and Joshua knew from bitter experience that 38 years previously that people even at this point had failed to consecrate themselves and so the Lord said there'll be no wonders with you there'll be no wonders tomorrow here because here are a people who are not consecrated to me you want to see great things you want to take possession of the land you want the good things but you're not prepared to commit yourself and so don't even think that tomorrow there will be wonders here and Joshua knew that and so he says to the people you think everything's set well yes in a sense it is but don't mess it up now you make sure you're consecrated to the

Lord and what awful consequences there had been on that first occasion when the people had failed to consecrate themselves 38 years wandering in the desert every last one of them who was over 20 years of age died before they ever got a chance to cross the Jordan and what lessons does that have for us today well are we on the brink of the Lord doing wonderful things well you know I think that God's people are always on the brink we're always on the verge of seeing the Lord doing wonderful things amongst us but often we don't see them because we fail at this point because we are not consecrated and so we find that we remain on the verge or perhaps on some occasions awful and dreadful consequences maybe months or years of wandering in the desert why because when the crunch came we were not willing to do what

Joshua tells the people to do on this occasion to consecrate themselves will we allow opportunities to slip opportunities to be part of and to experience and to see in our own midst as individuals as families as congregations the Lord doing amazing things doing wonders amongst us for a failure to do this one thing that is needful this particular requirement that Joshua impresses upon the people sanctify yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you and of course the people did what was required they did consecrate themselves and they did indeed see and experience wonders in their midst they crossed the Jordan on dry land and they went on to take possession of the promised land and all of this for a glorious purpose a glorious purpose that we can simply read and note in verse towards the end of chapter 4 and verses 23 to 24 what was the glorious purpose of the

Lord's wonders for the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you until you were passed over as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea which he dried up from before us until we were gone over that the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord that it is mighty that you might fear the Lord your God forever a glorious purpose that the peoples of the earth that these Canaanites and Hivites and Jebusites and all the rest of them that they would look on and say ah what a God is the God of the Israelites some had been wise enough to see it already the prostitute Rahab she had already seen it and she said ah you have a great God and I want to be on your side but some hadn't seen it yet but after that day when the Jordan opened up and the people crossed over yes the people would tremble and they would say what a God the God of the Israelites even

the waters obey that God and as we would seek and as we would ask God to do wonders amongst us and as we would do what we are required to do consecrate ourselves that the purpose might be that even those who remain on the outside even those who fail to come in and we welcome all to come in but even those who fail to come in would be forced to say what a great God is the God of Roskine Free Church what a great God is the God of the Christians you know we've entitled the video that's been produced ordinary people with an extraordinary God and our prayer is that that is precisely what people would look on and say there's not much to them but some God some God that they follow some God who does wonders in their midst but there is an impact so amongst God's people that they would fear the Lord your God forever that we would see indeed and that we would appreciate better what a great God we have and in consequence that we would fear him and that we would follow him forever God grant that it would be so let us pray heavenly father we come before you and we thank you that you are indeed the living God the God of all the earth you're the one who reigns you're the one who holds this world and this universe and our own individual lives in the palm of your hand

[28 : 57] Lord we thank you that you are a wonder working God you're the God who created this universe who sustains it Lord we don't claim that you are not doing wonders even now for we have much to look on and be amazed by in the work that you do even in our own lives and in our midst but our prayer is that you would do even a greater thing and that indeed those around about would look on and observe and see what a great God we have and above all Lord that they might be drawn to such a God they might see that this is a God with whom they can enter into a personal and saving relationship heavenly father we recognize that there is much needful on our part that we would be united in action that we would all play our part that we would all know what it is to launch out in faith and recognize that as we do so so you will be the one who will open the way and you will make the way straight for us

Lord that we would recognize this overwhelming requirement this necessary condition that we would sanctify ourselves that we would consecrate ourselves and so on the morrow we might see wonders in our midst and we ask all these things in Jesus name amen