

Crossing the Jordan

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[0 : 00] In Joshua chapter 3, and we may read at verse 13, Joshua 3, 13, and it shall come to pass as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand upon a heap.

Well, this is the account, or a good bit of the account, of the crossing of Jordan by the generation of the children of Israel who were to capture and to settle, with God's covenanted help, the promised land, Canaan.

Now, the experience of the church in the Old Testament, Paul tells us, for example, in so many words, the experiences of the Old Testament church are for the instruction of the church of the New Testament.

Well, of course, we're familiar with the ceremonial, the priestly ceremonial arrangements of the Old Testament, connected with Old Testament worship.

And the ceremonial arrangements provide a body of the rich commentary on the redemption that has been accomplished and is being applied by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 54] Not only so, but God's dealings in a general way with his people in the Old Testament, and his dealings with his people remain substantially the same in both dispensations of the church.

These dealings find illustration in the Old Testament times for the instruction of believers in New Testament times.

And great principles can be extracted. Without the help of these great principles, our Christian experience, our Christian sense of responsibility, our Christian sense of privilege, must be impoverished.

So principles can be extracted. So principles can be extracted. Now, it's another question whether I can extract them, but I'd like with these thoughts in mind to see at least something of what the crossing of the Jordan by Israel at this time has to teach us.

First of all, the general preparation for the crossing. Now, the whole business was of the Lord. Its planning and its execution was of the Lord.

[3 : 25] And the fact that it was of the Lord was thrown into relief by that solitary stance of the company of priests with the Ark in the midst of Jordan.

And by the fact that it was around this group of priests with the Ark that the waters of the Jordan actually parted to let the people through.

The Ark represented the presence of Jehovah with Israel. Of course, it is true that the crossing took place in connection with a great deal of attention to ordinary practical details concerned with getting this great camp underway in proper marching order.

For example, the baggage was hung across. For example, the baggage was hung across. It wasn't flitted miraculously across. The walking involved was ordinary walking.

The orderly transit of Israel was carried out under the normal supervision of the officers who were mentioned in verse 2. So that no miracles were performed unnecessarily by Jehovah.

[4 : 45] But there was this single great central truth which the children of Israel had to be clear about.

That no crossing of the Jordan whatsoever would have taken place by that people without the very special intervention of Jehovah.

Now we can draw some running lessons for Christianity. All effective Christian service is done by the power of Christ our Savior.

Putting him and his intercessions at the centre of our life. And Christians require to keep this truth in the forefront.

Not least when they are engaged with a great many day-to-day practicalities. That's when Satan can make us most abuse the practicalities of life.

[5 : 57] When they are heavily upon us, and often they have to be, he can get us to forget the central truth that there is no progress but by the power of God.

The power of Christ. But of course it remains true that in the Christian life, as well as in the life of the Old Testament believer, no miracles so to say are performed unnecessarily.

It is in the context of faithfulness to down-to-earth duties that God will use and will bless our Christian service.

There was all that normal care, common sense, prudence. The spies were sent out.

They weren't given the information by some mysterious means. The officers, they were genuine, ordinary officers going about the ranks of the people and the various distributions of the camp.

[7 : 02] And even the ark itself, it certainly had a mystical reference there, but it was used at a certain fixed distance from the people as an unorderedly guiding device.

You haven't passed this way before, see that you keep the ark a good bit ahead of you so that you will not lose your way. And there's this point that we might make, that the great crossing of the Jordan by the forth-putting of the Lord's wonder-working power was to give Israel confidence for the future.

Hereby ye shall know that he will without fail drive out the Canaanites, well all these Hittites and Hivites and Perizzites and so on.

Their confidence was to, for the battle campaign ahead of them, was to rest solidly upon the God who was helping them now. And Christians are to remember surely that the future doesn't depend at all upon them but upon God, upon God's care exclusively.

And each successive, especially impressive experience of God's grace, and there are a lot of them in every Christian's life, each of these especially impressive experiences are meant to butt this thought that the future is entirely in God's hands.

[8 : 42] Your heavenly Father says, Jesus, knoweth that ye have need of these things. The moral will take care of the things of itself, but the moral will not take care of the things of itself along in each fatalistic line.

It's only under the loving care and provision of the heavenly Father. And the more we have, the more of these special experiences of His grace we have, the more convinced we will be of that truth.

We should note this in the way that there's emphasis laid upon the place that the Word of God had in the significant progress of the Lord's people.

You find the officers with instructions from Joshua, who would do instructions from God, going and commanding the people, remove from your place and go after the ark.

And then later on, hear the words of the Lord your God. The crossing of this flooded Jordan, and none of the Israelites would have wanted to face it if they'd been left to their own choice.

[9 : 59] They would have waited till the harvest was passed and the floods went down, or they would have gone round some other way if they could. The crossing of the flood of the flood of the flood of Jordan, which led them on into a battle campaign about whose grimness they were left to no doubt at all.

That was done under the prompting of the word of God. And in the Christian life, surely it's the word that prompts to action.

And as in the case of Israel, it's the word that maintains confidence in a victorious outcome. Hear the word of the Lord your God. Hear the word of the Lord your God. Hereby ye shall know that the living God is Amano.

We might notice in passing again that the officers made sure that all the people knew.

They went in and out among the people. That is to say the word of God had actually to reach the people. No man was to sort of trickle across the river because he happened to see his neighbour lifting his tent and he thought it would be a good idea to follow.

[11 : 12] And the Lord doesn't want Christians who kind of trickle through their day's work because somebody else happens to do something. Or they read about a good man that lived long ago and they would like to be like him.

Christians must have the inner prompting of the word of God by the spirit and for this they need actually to know the word of God. So there's an underlining here by implication of the need of Bible

study, of careful doctrinal teaching and preaching, and just as careful observance of what is said. That is a prime secret of Christian progress. Then there's this point, before we pick up the second main thought, that the Israelites were not allowed to forget that they were going forward to battle against powerful enemies.

To battle against powerful enemies was something that they were told about.

It was something that they were having to prepare themselves for all the time. Nobody tried to hide from them that they were giants in Canaan. Nobody tried to hide from them that they were fenced cities.

[12 : 33] But God had said that they would overcome these. They were not allowed in any case to forget that they were going forward to battle. Christians are not allowed by the word of God, whether in the Old Testament it comes to them, or in the New Testament.

They are not allowed to forget that they are fighting a battle. They are fighting not against flesh and blood. They are fighting against principalities and powers.

They are fighting against great enemies.

Now if the children of Israel prepared for great enemies through what the word of God said to them, then Christians too, by the same word of God, should prepare each day for fighting with great enemies.

Christians are therefore to adopt a fighting attitude. Isn't this necessary, friends, that we should be reminded of this from the word of God? Isn't it so easy to become complacent, even when we know that we have Christian service to do to become apathetic or merely negative?

[14 : 05] Well, the truth is that we don't win one inch of Canaan's land, but by battling in the Lord's name.

And so, as we were praying earlier, it is battle conscious Christians that we need. In every day, and I should think today as much as any other day, battle conscious Christians.

Now, could we look in the second place at the evangelical character of the crossing? You had the Ark of the covenant of the Lord at the center of things.

The Ark representing God, the priests representing the people before God. The Ark, of course, incorporated a divinely established mercy seat.

And on the arrangements for atonement around that mercy seat, all the hopes of Israel were built.

[15 : 15] And they weren't allowed to forget this, because they were constantly surrounded by priestly activity. Christians, they have better sacrifices, they have a better priesthood, that they have to consider the question of atonement all the time.

This man, Jesus, has offered up one sacrifice for sins forever, says the writer to the Hebrews. And the Christian's hopes are built on this.

It's the hope set before them, which is as an anchor entering into that within the veil, where the forerunner has entered.

The Ark of the everlasting cabinet. And it's good when we are thinking of the duty set before us, to remember how sinful and weak we are.

And against that, to remember how we have an everlasting priest. Our sins, our constant sins, and failures and weaknesses and infirmities as believers.

[16 : 28] Our enforced sense of helplessness. That constantly appalls the sensitive Christians. It's a good thing.

It's a good thing to, in an evangelical context, to be appalled by our unworthiness and our helplessness. Because then if we are conscious of these things, we will be far more likely to make a fitting and proper use of Christ's high priestly intercession.

Well, we constantly change and are unfaithful. But the arrangements for the pardon of our sins, the arrangements for the helping of our infirmities, they haven't offered.

So it is the Ark of the everlasting covenant. The everlasting high priestly intercession of Christ that is our hope.

And that thought, of course, the exclusiveness of Christ, our great and eternal high priest, would be underlined by the fact that the rod that budded was within the Ark of the Cabinet.

[17 : 45] You remember that God in this way had brought out the exclusiveness of Aaron, the high priest, against others who had presumed functions that didn't belong to them.

They had perished and many thousands of their devotees perished with them. But Aaron was established conspicuously by God as the exclusive high priest.

And the safe and helpful course for the Christian is to cast in his lot with the New Testament, Aaron. Then there's, we could mention the tables with the Ten Commandments in the Ark.

And the fact that only a little after this, the question of God's blessing only an obedient Israel came to a head.

[18 : 59] In the instance of Achan who had disobeyed flagrantly the commandment of God. And the whole campaign at Ai came unstuck around Achan's disobedience.

So the Christian is reminded by this thought that at the centre of the promise of blessing and help there is this demand for obedience to God.

The pot that had manna. Of course each of these I'm certain could take two or three sermons in their own account that we would be an...

And the scripture I think not to refer to them. The ark had significance not only for itself as a structure but for what happened around it and what was contained inside it.

And the pot that had manna was the pledge of God's faithfulness to support his people. Manna had been provided in the wilderness of all places for the people of God.

[20 : 05] And it was an each and every day provision. That was a miracle as great as the manna itself. That there was this an ending supply all the journey through for the children of Israel.

And Paul says to the believer who served the Lord, My God shall supply all your need according to his riches and glory.

In a way commensurate with his resources in Christ Jesus. Then there's this thought. That the ark that led them across the...

Within the company of the priest. The ark that led them across the Jordan. That prepared a way for them in the Jordan. Was said to be the ark of the God of all the earth.

And Christians need to remember that as they are called to Christian service, it's not a thing insulated within the four walls of a hall or a church.

[21 : 10] It's something that's very mystical and that may have very little effect on the world as a whole. Christians are up to get this feeling sometimes.

And it's a very depressing feeling. Even when you see many people not going to church on Sunday. And there's a few people going to your church relatively speaking. You can get this feeling that you're in a kind of island.

And there's sort of no connection. God announced something here that was to get the children of Israel over this feeling.

The temptation to feel like this. God is sovereign over the earth. He's sovereign over all events and all people. And we Christians were going out in service to, out into the future.

A future that God has control of. He goes before you, said Joshua. You remember Elijah's test of whether Jehovah was the God.

[22 : 19] It was the most practical test. I mean, there was wonder working in it. And yet, it was a test that the merest child could examine for himself and approve.

A practical test. And God wants to remind us that he is the effective ruler of men and affairs.

The God that asks you and me to go and witness in the world. He wants us to get rid of this feeling that we are in an island. That there's no connection with the world outside.

It's the God of all the earth that we are called upon to serve. The God that works. The God that demonstrates to his people and to the world around them.

That he is their God. Now, the third main point is this. Just a few conspicuous features of the crossing itself.

[23 : 21] Now, the Jordan was at its flood level all the time of harvest.

And people might ask, people probably were asking. Why now? Why did God, why did Jehovah arrange to bring us here now?

He could have done it at some other time. Surely, of course, he could. But he didn't. And he had good reasons for not doing it. Bringing them, that is to say, at a low level time.

Now, there's hardly, I suggest friends, there's hardly a Christian day without some such feature in it. You know, the high level Jordan feature in it.

I mean, there's lots of difficulties in our daily lives as Christians. Annoying things, irritating things, things that can spark off our anger or anything like that.

[24 : 26] But there are, in most days at least, there are things represented by Jordan at High Flags. Now, one thing we can see from the explicit teaching of the chapter is that this crossing was

to be outstandingly, this particular crossing at flood level time, was to be outstandingly an instructive crossing.

Hereby ye shall know that the Lord is in the midst of you and that he's going before you. And the people were being asked to adjust their minds to the Lord's working in ways that they didn't expect. That, of course, is something that we have, as Christians, to have adjusted our minds to. You know, when you're in the middle of a busy day and somebody comes, just that when you're at your busiest and your irritation is mounting, you're obviously meant to deal with that person in a Christian way. The person wouldn't have come if the Lord hadn't led him there at that exact time. And surely the Lord means us to face these situations as Christians and prove, well, maybe in a very modest way compared to this, that he is a wonder-working God, that he can give us to cope with these things and use us in an expected way to forward his kingdom.

Or maybe, maybe more often than not, the other person is somebody who can help us. He's a wonder-working God. Now that's a very easy cliché. But it is true of God and of his ways.

[26 : 12] It's his way to bring his people to Jordan, which is flooded all the time of harvest. We can think of Paul's teaching, if we want to follow this out, about his multiple afflictions.

When he was writing in the second epistle to the Corinthians, he was talking about his match patience and his afflictions and his necessities.

And when you read through the list, it's overwhelming. And he doesn't spare them. He tells them very explicitly. And in anybody else but Paul, you would say, this fellow is trying to shoot a line, but you can't say that about Paul.

I mean, he wasn't that kind of man and he was writing as an apostle. But it's an overwhelming list of afflictions. And he says that the reason he went through all that was that he might approve himself as the minister of God.

You know, later on he says, we are chastened and not killed. Now, of course, troubles will come to us in any case because man is born to trouble.

[27 : 31] We are heirs to trouble. We can't escape them unless we went out of this world, which we can't, not till God's time comes. But then for the Christian, as well as the troubles as a general allotment, there are the troubles that arise, well, if he's an honourable Christian, from persecution or persecution in some degree or another.

If he's an industrious Christian, a conscientious Christian, there will be the troubles arising from his labours. Paul very specially mentioned labours in his service for the Lord.

His labours and privations, which are unavoidable in properly furthering the gospel. He talks about chastisements.

Now, even the apostle Paul needed the fatherly correction of God, like all Christians. And some of the troubles that come to the Christian have very specific reference to correction.

And no doubt we could say that all of his troubles will have benefits in that way. But yet, Paul talks about his troubles by and large as being necessary to prove and demonstrate his ministry.

[28 : 51] The quality of his discipleship. And there's something of this in the life of all Christians. The troubles come.

And they come that there may be demonstrated in your life and mine, that the power and the love and the faithfulness of God in bringing his people through trials.

And so that will commend the gospel to others through the character that is forged. Paul was talking about it being necessary that the ministry should not be blamed.

And he was referring to the character of those who represented the gospel. And then he went on to talk about being approved as a minister who was worthy of the gospel through his tribulations.

So that if we're going to be Christians of any use at all, it will have to be an experience of the grace of God bringing us through trouble that will approve us as having a character that commends the gospel and corresponds to the gospel.

[30 : 08] Then there's another purpose in view. Not only were the Israelites themselves to realize that God was in their midst, but they had a story to tell to their children.

Those men were to carry the stones and set the stones up in the middle of the place where the priests had stood.

And then the children would ask, well, what mean these stones? And they were to reply, look, the Lord, the Lord brought us across the river Jordan and dried up the waters of the Jordan.

Now, a story, you know, you can tell your children about the Lord. But a story of that kind gathers conviction and it gathers vigour and it gathers realism when the man or the woman can speak out of experience.

You know, you tell it differently when you're talking about something that's happened to yourself. If you're virtually giving your testimony, it's got power behind it. Because nobody can rob you of that experience.

[31 : 27] And here was a story that had their own personal experience behind it. And no professing Christian can expect to teach his child really and truly without a genuine experience of the Lord's grace and help often in a wonderful way.

It doesn't ring true without that. So we need to have the troubles if we're going to be able to teach the next generation what the Lord has meant to us in trouble. I mean, grace has no meaning. Grace has no meaning except with reference to our plight.

The crossing of the Jordan, again, was to be the prelude to the whole campaign of victory. That could bring to mind the hymn writer's words, each victory will help you some other to win.

Yes, but how? How does each victory help some other to win? Well, here you've got the doctrine virtually stated. Hereby, by this victory, by this success, with my presence, ye shall know that I am in the midst of you, and that I will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, etc., etc., etc.

So the way that each victory helps a believer some other to win is that he is convinced of the Lord's presence and experience, and he has the Lord's stated assurance that he will be with him not only in six troubles, but in seven.

[33 : 05] Now, by faith, we are told, in Hebrews, a minister feels very frustrated when he goes to Hebrews chapter 11, thinking that he's going to get a reference to the events of Joshua chapter 3 and the records of the heroes of the faith.

And he doesn't find it. He finds the crossing of the Red Sea, and he finds the taking of Jericho. By faith, Israel passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, and the walls of Jericho fell down flat after they were encompassed about seven days.

But, of course, the Jordan crossing was part of the one story, part of the series of activities of faith leading to the settlement of Canaan.

Now, one outstanding point which I wanted to treat as outstanding is this, that the Red Sea lay as unnegotiable for this huge company of people as usual when they came to it.

In the case of the Jordan, the roaring floodwaters were roaring as usual all the time of harvest. In the case of Jericho's walls, not a trickle of masonry fell until the prescribed journeys on the seven days had been completed.

[34 : 39] And here what was required was an obedient entry right into the impossible situation by faith. And there would be no opening of the way until this was done.

And then, not before it, God proved himself faithful. Sometimes, of course, it's true, the Lord does give encouraging previous indications that he will help us in a difficult situation.

I mean, when Simon Peter found, through the angelic visit, that the chains fell off from his arms, and he wasn't a bit surprised, well, he was surprised to an extent, but not so surprised, when he discovered that successive doors opened leading out to the street.

So, of course, it is in the case that there are no circumstances where God doesn't give us advanced encouragement so that we'll go on and carry on with what he's asking us to do.

But very often, there are no such encouraging circumstances. And what is required is the obedience of faith.

[35 : 56] Whether it's in, for example, missionary evangelism, or our Christian teaching of our children, do we expect that the little boy is going to sort of develop a halo as we begin to teach him that we'll be able to regard him as a child of promise by some kind of external signs?

This is not the way the Lord wants us to do it. We've got to, whatever he looks like, however he behaves, whether he's got a halo or not, so to say, we've got to teach him, start off at the practical level without any promise of special encouragement.

And so it is with all the church's work, the efforts of Christians in the world of affairs, I mean, people who sit in committees, people who, Christians who try to bring their Christianity to bear on worldly councils, they've got a fearful job.

You know, perhaps sitting back in our armchair as we're looking at the television, running about to and fro of MPs, we might be inclined to think that we could do better than some of them. Well, maybe we could, maybe we couldn't. But as far as Christian MPs are concerned, or men in local government, they've got a terrific job to bring their Christianity to bear effectively upon their fellow men who may not be inclined that way.

[37 : 23] And, you know, it would be nice if your fellow councillor opposite you, who was perhaps an atheist and doing atheistic things constantly throughout the history of the council, if someday he suddenly began to smile and encourage you in what you were going to say.

But it's very often not like this. You've got to get down to the hard graft of doing the righteous thing without any external encouragements, and the Lord will bless you, not usually, not before, but after you have done the right thing.

And we've got to carry this principle into the whole of our life. We must get into the habit of not waiting for propitious signs. The Lord may give them, but usually he won't before we do what we're required to do.

And some of the best Christian work is done in exactly these circumstances. Nothing outward to encourage, only the reverse, threatening things, dismaying things, except to the eye of faith. And the Christian, with the eye of faith, of course you will see the difficulties as being so much material for God to make a victorious way through.

[38 : 41] Well, these are some of the things that this crossing, the story of the crossing of the Jordan by Israel teaches us.

The last thing that I would say would be this, is that there, after the priests went into the Jordan, into the middle of the river, they stood there.

And they stood there until the whole operation was completed. When they went into the water, and not before it, the water parted.

And after they came up out of the water, the water came together again. Now I think that here we have fear under guarding for that well-known expression that evangelicals sometimes use.

You've got to pray it through. Or you've got to pray him through. Now you might think maybe that there was dubious theology attached to that.

[39 : 49] Well, maybe sometimes there is, but it's a perfectly sound biblical idea. that a lot of things we don't continue, if we think of the priests there, pointing the way to the intercessions of the Christian.

A lot of things we don't get done properly, let's put it that way, because we don't intercede all the way through. We don't remain in the stance of intercessor.

You begin to pray for somebody in the congregation, and they listen to you, maybe for a few weeks, six months, a year. You get opportunities for tracks, you get grand conversations, and then you say to your friend one day, you know, the thing is getting pretty, pretty gummy.

I can't seem able to get through to this person now. I won't even accept the conversation. Well, there may be two answers to that. You may say, well, that's just the way the Lord wants things to turn out.

On the other hand, it may be due entirely to the fact that you haven't prayed the situation through. You didn't stay in the place of intercession until the operation was completed.

[41 : 01] Said James in his epistle, ye have not because ye ask not. Now, I wonder if in our lives, there are not things of that kind.

We have failed to stay. We've undertaken plenty of activity, but we have failed to stay the course with intercession.

We came up out of the water before the whole column was across. We didn't pray the situation through. I'm sure that we must have circumstances in our own lives, however good at praying we may be, however effective under God as intercessors, situations where we have not stood as intercessors till the whole operation was completed.

may God bless to us, our meditation on his word. Let us pray. O God, we pray thee to seal the instruction of thy truth upon our minds and hearts.

we thank thee for the heavenly intercession of Christ, and that thy people under his presidency, and under the ministry of his spirit, are expected to go and serve, however difficult the surrounding environment.

[42 : 35] We bless thee that his intercessions are there, carried on, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

We pray thee, Lord, that we may not depend upon events turning out in such a way that there will be propitious signs attached to all our Christian duties, or even to the most of our Christian duties. We pray thee, Lord, that we may know that sometimes thou dost require the sheer obedience of faith, response obediently to what the word has said, and with the promise, in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not.

Lord, there are plenty of things to make us faint, but may we not fail at our task and may we be quite happy to accept tasks where there are no external encouragements at the time, as with the children of Israel crossing the Jordan.

And we bless you that each victory will help us some other to win. Seal the whole instruction of thy word upon mind and conscience and life.

[43 : 52] We ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.