

Crossing the Jordan

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[0 : 0 0] Will you turn with me now to Joshua chapter 3, and in our sweep through the book of Joshua we will look today at the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. Joshua chapter 3. You remember last week we examined Rahab, who was a prostitute who lived in Jericho, one of the great cities of Canaan. And we remember how the children of Israel were within sight of Canaan, within sight of the promised land. And Joshua sent two spies into Jericho and into the country round about to see the land because they had to go in and possess it. They had to go in and drive out all the enemies that were there. And we remember how we saw that the king of Jericho found out that these two spies were there, and that he sent soldiers to arrest them, to find them and arrest them. And we saw how Rahab had become a believer in the God of Israel Israel, and that she hid the spies, and not only hid the spies, but sent them off in the wrong direction. And then as these two spies were going to return to Joshua, Rahab, recognizing that the children of Israel were going to come in and were going to capture the whole of Jericho, she asked them and received a promise of safety for herself and for her family. That is, when the children of Israel would come, that she and her family would not be destroyed. And the two spies agreed to this, that because they had been looked after by Rahab and she hadn't told on them, she hadn't revealed their whereabouts to the soldiers, they agreed that she and all her family would be saved. And the way that her house was to be marked was there was a scarlet thread to be hanging out the window. And we saw and examined Rahab's faith. And we saw that her faith was really a great faith.

She believed that the God of Israel would help and enable the children of Israel to come in, not only to cross the river Jordan, but would be able to capture Jericho and destroy it. Now Jericho, as well as having to cross the river Jordan, the Jericho was an almost impregnable city, because it had this tremendous wall round about it. It was so big and so thick that houses were built upon it. And the river Jordan was also, it was a special time of the year, it was in spate.

It was the springtime of the year, that is April. Now I know that further on it says it was harvest time, but yes, that is right out there. It was the early harvest time, which was March, April, and this was about April. So it was the springtime when the snows up in the hills would melt, and the river would be in full flood, and the river would overflow its banks. But also at that time, you see, it was so wide and so running so fast that it would be very difficult to cross. But in spite of all that, and Rahab didn't understand how God was going to do it, she knew that it was going to happen.

So we saw that it was a great faith that she had. And we also saw that her faith was based upon little knowledge. She didn't have much learning, she didn't have much that she had been taught about God at all. Because she lived in a heathen family, and she lived in a heathen city, she was surrounded by heathens, and the little that she had heard, she would probably have heard it from heathen lips. But she had heard about the God of Israel, and the little she heard, she believed.

And we saw how her testimony will surely condemn those people who remain in persistent unbelief, although they hear the gospel freely preached to them, Sabbath after Sabbath, and have the word of God freely available to them. That Rahab will be able to stand up and witness against them, because of their little reaction, their little response to the fullness of the gospel which is preached to them, when she believed and was saved by just those little rumors that she heard about the God of Israel. And then we saw that her faith was active. She believed that Jericho was going to be destroyed, so it immediately made her think of herself, her own safety, and of her family. She showed a tremendous concern for her loved ones. And again, we saw how her very action in seeking safety for her own family, because she asked the two spies to make sure that her own family would be safe as well. And they agreed when they said that her family should be brought to her house, so that they would all be safe in the house with the scarlet thread hanging out the window.

[4 : 44] And we saw that her action in showing this loving concern for her family will surely witness against those who show an unusual unconcern for their own loved ones. Have you unsaved parents, an unsaved wife, an unsaved husband? And are you here without them? Have you brothers and sisters, cousins? Have you children? And are you here today without them, not knowing where they are? You see, though Rahab was more than likely the black sheep of the family, she was probably frowned upon by the other members of the family. She was most certainly kept at arm's length, because she was a prostitute, that is, somebody who sells her body for money. But although there would have been a coolness between her and the rest of the family, she loved them. She loved them sincerely, and she wouldn't be content with her own safety unless her own family was saved as well. She knew where her safety lay, and she wanted the rest of the family to be with her in the house. Well, we also know, the Christians amongst us know, where our safety lies. It lies in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. We know about the Lord Jesus Christ. Can we rest without getting our own loved ones in to the safety of Calvary as well? Can we just go on not paying any attention to the vitally important message of the gospel to them? It's all very well giving the children and giving people the best of the material things, giving the children the latest gear, the latest football strips, the latest things so that they are completely in fashion. But if their little souls are on the way to hell, it is of no concern really to them the sort of things that they get now if they finish up eternally lost.

Rahab points an accusing finger at all those who do not pay enough attention to the raising of their loved ones. As David said, is the young man Absalom saved? Poor David asked that question when it was too late.

Because when he asked, is the young man Absalom saved? Absalom was already dead. The greatest display of you, love, the greatest display of your concern for loved ones, is that by word and example, you bring them, and you do everything in your power to bring them to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Rahab's faith was active, and then we saw that Rahab's faith was also an obedient faith. A scarlet thread hanging out of the window, hanging out of a particular window of her own house, and all her family gathered there. That was what she did, that's what she was told to do, and that's exactly what she did. So we saw that attention to detail is important. We profess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we say we love him, and we say we love him. He says, if you love me, keep my commandments.

[7 : 52] Does Rahab's attention to detail, her obedience to what she did, does it shame us? And then we saw that Rahab's faith was a witnessing faith. Her scarlet thread was hung in the window.

That's what she was told to do, and it wasn't show off at all, but it was hung where it could be seen by those who needed to see it. It was a public sign. She wasn't afraid to witness that she was depending upon the scarlet thread to recognize her, and so she would be recognized, and that it would identify her as somebody who was to be shown mercy to. It was a public sign. Well, there's a lot of you here who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you died this very day, your hope, your only hope would be in him. Yet, you do not make a public profession of him. You don't unite with his people. You attend the minimum of church gatherings, the minimum of services, the minimum of the means of grace, lest you should be accused of being religious. You're very afraid that you should be known as a religious person, as a believer, that you should be known as a Christian. You're happy enough to remain in the background, to remain in the shadows, so that nobody can see what you are. Are you ashamed?

Are you ashamed of naming the name of Jesus? Well, it's very strange that you should be ashamed when really he has all the excuses for being ashamed of you. You have no reason to be ashamed of him, because he took your nature upon himself. He took your sins upon himself. He died for you. So why, oh why, should you be ashamed to proclaim and profess his name, to own his name? Come forward, my friend, and tie the scarlet thread boldly in the window of your life, and walk through this world as somebody who believes that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour, is your Saviour, and that you are not ashamed to own his name. And also, parents and those who have houses, hang that scarlet thread in the windows. Let the world know that your house is a house that praises the Lord, a house in which there is family worship morning and evening, a house where there is no obscene thing that the Lord Jesus Christ would be ashamed to see if he ever stepped into that house, as he most certainly will one day. Hang the scarlet thread in the window. Let people know that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, the end of the story was, on last week, was that we saw that Rahab and her household were saved. And not only were they saved from the destruction, but we saw later on, by going to Matthew chapter 1 in a genealogy table there, that Rahab married into one of the foremost families in Israel, and that she was thereby engrafted into the family tree of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the family tree comes right down, and it goes through Rahab, and it goes through David, and Jesse and David, and finally the Lord Jesus Christ. So that she was engrafted into the family tree of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because she believed in God. And in our reading today, we see the children of Israel, and they're about to cross the River Jordan. They've come to the edge of the River Jordan, and after the spies returned, early in the morning after, after he received the report, Joshua moved his people right up to the banks of the River Jordan. And as he moved them up there to the banks of the River Jordan, moved them up right close to it, so they could contemplate it and look at it, the people there would surely wonder, what was the point of approaching Jordan? When there were neither boats nor bridges to help them across. But Joshua knew that it was their duty to approach Jordan. That was their responsibility.

For God himself had said, way back in chapter 1, verse 11, within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan. So their responsibility was to come right up to the Jordan, and it was God's responsibility to get them across. And that's what Joshua did. He took all his people up to the very banks of the river. Look at the scene for a few moments. A vast crowd of men, women, and children, to say nothing of their baggage and their animals, approaching the river Jordan, which was at least a mile wide. For as we saw, it was in flood. And there at the river Jordan, the children of Israel encamped. Right at the banks of the Jordan, they lodged, we read. They were left to gaze upon the swollen, rushing river. They were left to walk up and down its banks and see what a dangerous flowing river it was, and was at least a mile wide. And they had nothing with which to cross it, and they could see Jericho in the distance, and they knew that that was where they had to go.

[12 : 45] Why did Joshua bring them up as close as that? So that they could contemplate and see the impossibility of this unfordable river. Well, was it not to impress upon them, and impress upon Joshua, and upon the children of Israel, their own utter helplessness? Was it not to make them depend more completely upon God? Because they could see that there was no way they could go across that river. Well, my friends, in our own lives, God deals with us like this often. He deals with us whereby he brings us to the end of our own resources.

He brings us to points where we cannot solve the problems and the obstacles by our own human wit and intelligence. We can see no answer to it. And God, in his wisdom, sees that by nature we are self-reliant.

We like to do things ourselves. We are proud. And God wants us to see ourselves as we really are. He wants us to see how frail we are by nature, really. And he wants us to realize that our own strength is not sufficient. He wants us to look and to see and recognize that the real strength, the real overcoming of problems comes from him. That time, you see, before the unfordable river of Jordan was a real teaching time for the children of Israel. There were still hard times to go through once they reached the promised land. And they were being taught here more and more to depend upon God and his almighty power.

And very soon he was going to show by the miracle that this almighty power was available for them as long as they followed his path. God was displaying his mighty power in their weakness. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. And it's frequently the case that we have to be painfully aware of our own weakness.

We have to become painfully aware of our own helplessness before we turn to God for help. You ask a lot of people, have you ever prayed? And they will point to certain crises in their lives when, yes, prayer was forced out of them. God in his mercy uses those providences to make us pray to him. Psalm 107.

[15 : 09] Again, Psalm 107. There was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. They draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord. They are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. You see, they are brought into a desperate situation, and then it is that they cry unto the Lord. And note it is cry. It is not a cold formal asking for help, not a cold formal petition, but a heart cry to the Lord. And such a cry is always responded to by the Lord. Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you will glorify me.

We all, you see, at some time in our lives have times of trouble and difficulties that appear insurmountable. There is no answer to them. Oh, my friends, may we trustfully turn to him who is able and willing to help us at such times. Joshua's officers went throughout the camp telling the people to get ready to move. When the priests moved off to the Ark of the Covenant, they were to follow.

You see, their eyes suddenly, that was what the people, the officers told them. Now, as soon as the Ark of the Covenant moves, you have to move with it. The word from God was to lift their eyes from the swollen, rushing river, to lift their eyes from Jordan, and look to the Ark, because that's where their safety lay. God's presence amongst them. And when the Ark moved, they were to move.

The Ark itself was a coffer or a chest made of wood, and it was overlaid outside and inside with pure gold. And in the Ark were the two tablets of stone upon which the commandments, the Ten Commandments, were written and had been given to Moses on Mount Sinai. So that the Ark had become a symbol of God's presence among them, a symbol of the covenant entered into with Abram and then with Moses. They would be his people and God would be their God and they would keep his commandments. The Ark, you see, all the time coming the 40 years through the wilderness usually went in the middle of the host, in the middle of the people. But this time, crossing the river Jordan, God ordered that it should be moved up to the very front. And not only to the very front, but about half a mile in front of the people so that everybody would be able to see it. If it was immediately at the front, only the people at the front would be able to see it. But half a mile further on and all of the children of Israel would be able to see the Ark as it moved. Well, what I seen, my friends, what I seen that morning. The people ready to move, hundreds of thousands of them. Some of them, some commentators placed the number as two and a half million. But anyway, there was hundreds of thousands of them, tents struck and packed, looking and waiting to see the Ark of the covenant, waiting for the Ark to move. And then suddenly a little group begins to move, a tiny little group of people, the chosen band of priests, white-robed and barefooted, carrying the

Ark. And they approach the river Jordan. They approach the waters of the river Jordan. Absolute silence throughout that whole host, because all the arguments would have been finished by now, because here was the crunch. The arguments, all the would-be engineers who had worked out how to cross, there would be people who would have said, we can't cross now, we'll have to wait four or five months until the waters go down. And all of those ideas and arguments and plans and promises and everything like that, absolutely still now, because here was the time of testing. Every eye fixed on that little group of priests as they walked slowly towards the Jordan. Nearer and nearer, and as they were coming nearer, the people watching the waters, one eye and the Ark of one eye in the water, to see what was going to happen. And nothing happened. The water still thundering down, still flowing freely. But as soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the whole river began to divide and shrink away.

[19 : 20] And as the priests walked on into the very middle, the waters opened up before them as if it was running away from them, as if the water was afraid of them. And we read here that a way back up at a place called Adam, a way back up the river Jordan, a place called Adam, which was about 30 miles away, the flow of water was stopped. And there was nothing then to replace the water that was flowing down, so the riverbed became dry for miles. And we read, and the priests that bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan. And all the Israelites passed over on dry ground until all the people were passed clean over. Now it was a test of faith for them all to enter in with their families and everybody else into that. And we read that their waters were a great heap waiting to come charging down again. What a test of faith for them all to cross over there. But what a particular test of faith for the priests. Because they had to stand still in the middle of the river Jordan. And they had to wait hours before the great host passed over. But there in the middle, with one eye on the heap of water waiting to come down, and wondering how long it was going to stay there, but they had to stand still there.

Oh my friends, God's servants are often called upon to show a remarkable amount of courage. They're called upon to serve him, not only with obedience, but with courage. They have to have boldness and bravery.

In the face of threatening danger, in the face of strain, in the face of trouble that is approaching, they have to stand firm. And as the priests in the river Jordan stood firm, and I found that the God who suspended the flow of water, and who stopped the flow of water, that he was able to hold it there till the last person had gone over, so the servants of the Lord begin to realize and know that not in their own strength, but in the strength that is available to them through the Lord Jesus Christ, will they be able to overcome all obstacles. But that doesn't remove from you the responsibility of praying for them. Praying that they will have boldness to preach the full gospel. That they will not want to be popular by just preaching a doctrine of love. That they will not just preach half-truths, which is really a lie. That they will not just go for popularity, but that they will go for telling people the truth. That they will look upon themselves as merely just signposts pointing to heaven.

That they will not go for anything personal whatsoever, but that they are a servant of the living God. That they must decrease, he must increase. So pray that ministers everywhere will have boldness to preach the full gospel, and that God himself will give them the courage and the sense of responsibility to stand up and proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be not ashamed or afraid to do so. The children of Israel, all of them, the weak ones as well as the strong ones, young and old, those who murmured against it, the doubters as well as the fearless. Caleb, who was a great man and who followed the Lord fully all his life. And Achan, who was already beginning to look for the spoils and to look for the loot that was on the other side. They all safely crossed over. Not a single one lost in the river Jordan. If there had been some lost, you see, even Achan and these, it would have spoilt the glory of the Lord. God must have the glory, and not a single one of those people were to be lost. Well, in conclusion,

I wish to look for a few minutes at words we find in verse 4. You notice that when Joshua's officers went amongst the people, telling them to prepare to move, he says to them, for ye have not passed this way heretofore. You haven't come this way before. You haven't been this way before. The children of Israel had come out of Egypt. They had gone up and down the wilderness for 40 years, but they hadn't crossed the river Jordan before. So Joshua and his officers were busy going about amongst them, giving God's directions to them. They were going into unknown, uncharted territory for them. They were going to face a lot of things that they didn't know about, so God was giving them directions. Now as we go on into the future, we also are going into the unknown, because the future is unknown to each and every one of us.

[23 : 51] We have not been this way before. But those new and unknown to us, we take comfort from the fact that it is not new or unknown to God. We are able to sing with confidence to somebody who knows.

Show me thy ways, O Lord. Thy path so teach thou me. And do thou lead me in thy truth. Therein my teacher be. For with God, you see, the past, present and the future are seen as one. Your unforeseen problems were known to God before time was. There is no time of emergency with God. There's no panic. He's not surprised by anything. Or we fear what is in the future. We can shut our minds to it. But we fear coming sickness, maybe. We fear hospital. We fear a weakening that is coming on us and creeping over us because of old age. The fear of death haunts us as we see friends and relatives and people of our own generation gradually disappearing. But God doesn't wish us to be tormented. God doesn't wish us to stand about worrying and fretting and agonizing about the future. He doesn't wish our faith to fail or to be drained away by all this useless anxiety. The message from heaven is, comfort ye, comfort ye my people.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem. And what we have to say is that the unknown to you, the unknown road to you, is a well known road to God. Because of what he has done, as well as his own knowledge of all things.

Because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. He came and he walked this world and he went further into every situation that besets man than any of us could ever possibly do. In the garden of Gethsemane we read, he went a little further. Yes, of course he did. He went a little further into every situation, into every conceivable circumstance of life. The Lord Jesus Christ went into it. So that now he's able to look down and tell us, I know I've been there, but fear not, I am with you even unto the end of the world.

So what we're doing is not going into unknown territory, unknown to us, yes, but by following the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that we are following our shepherd, the one who is responsible for our safety. And that wherever he goes, we follow. Wherever he leads, we go. Because he is the one who is responsible for our safety. Where Jesus has gone, do not be afraid to go. Where Jesus has gone before, we can go. You see the children of Israel here, although they were going into unknown, uncharted territory, they could encourage themselves because they were heading in the right direction.

[26 : 52] Egypt was way back behind them. Before them lay the promised land. So they knew they were going in the right direction. They weren't turning back to Egypt. They were going ahead to the promised land.

Before them lay freedom. Behind them lay slavery. Each night as they moved on, they pitched their tent a day's march nearer the promised land. And now on the banks of the river Jordan. They were only a day's march away from that land. From that land that had been promised to them. A land flowing with milk and honey. Can I ask you my friend, are you traveling in the right direction? Are you going in the right way?

Are you heading back into Egypt, into the slavery of Egypt? Or have you turned your back on that? And despite all the difficulties and the unknownness of where you're going, is your face in the right direction? Are you heading in the right way? Have you ever asked yourself what is at the end of the road for you? Where is the end of the road for you? You know yourselves how maybe the older ones will remember that you used to go to during the war time anyway. You used to watch that the films that used to come round into the village halls. The Highlands and Islands, I can't remember what it was.

And they used to show films, black and white films in the village hall. And used to be great excitement. And used to be very good, innocent films shown. And partly news at the beginning giving us the latest news in the war.

But no matter how much you enjoyed the film, no matter how much you enjoyed being there for the evening, and they only came maybe once a month. There were two words that came up at the end of every single evening.

[28 : 42] And I usually dread it. These two words were the end. That comes to us all. No matter how much we are afraid of our coming, no matter how much we don't want it to come.

One of those days flashed up on the screen in front of you will be the end. Where will you be? Are you heading in the right direction? Well my friends, if you're not, do you want directions as the way you should go?

So, as you haven't passed this way before, one or two very quick words from what the children of Israel were given directions about. The first thing the children of Israel were told to do was to raise their eyes from their own circumstances, from the rushing River Jordan, from the darkness of the Jordan, from the impossibility of crossing over the River Jordan. Lift their eyes away from that.

And keep their eyes on the act of the covenant. So you, my friend, if you want to head in the right direction, must lift your eyes off the ground. Must lift your eyes off the things of this world.

The temporal things of time. And you must lift them to the supernatural, to the spiritual, to the Lord Jesus Christ. You must lift your eyes to the level of that cross at Calvary. You must see that there, and there only, is the safety that is offered to you. God says, whosoever believeth in him will not perish, but will have everlasting life. The ark of the covenant that had been made with Abraham. But this is the new covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ. And God reaches out to you today and wants to make a covenant with you and say, believe in my son and you will be most certainly saved. That's the covenant.

[30 : 16] In order to get to the promised land, you have to raise your eyes to Jesus and go where he leads you. Another thing we always notice about the children of Israel is that when they were, when the ark moved, they didn't hesitate to move. They didn't hesitate to cross the river Jordan. The police marched into the river and the water fled before them. And the people followed on. Immediately they followed on and marched on until they were all passed clean over. There was no delay. Well my friends, the King's Highway is already cleared for you. The Lord Jesus Christ has cleared the King's Highway. And now he asks you to move, he asks you to respond. He asks you to follow him. Why, oh why should you delay? Delay only means danger. Delay only means that your heart's getting harder. And Christ is on the move. Lift your eyes to him and see him. And what he says to you is, follow me. Are you going to let him go out of sight? Are you going to let him go completely beyond the horizon so you don't know where he is and you don't know which direction you are going to go to? While he is still passing by my friends and he is still saying to you, follow me. Then do it and don't delay. Join the others who are on the way to heaven with him until we all pass clean over into heaven. And then a third thing was that Joshua said to them to listen to God's word. Joshua said unto the children of Israel, come hither and hear the words of the Lord your God. Come hither and hear the words of the Lord your God. As I said, there would have been a lot of ideas on how to cross the river Jordan. A lot of ideas, a lot of clever schemes and all the rest, Bailey bridges and whatever, I don't know, that they would have put forward in order to cross the river Jordan. But Joshua says to them, forget all that. Come and listen to the word of God.

In the same way, my friend, you've got to forget your own ideas. You don't have a right to your own opinion. You don't have a right to your own ideas because they're all tainted by your own sin.

You're tainted by your very humanity. Listen to the word of God. He's the maker. It's the maker's handbook. What I'm telling you is straight from the maker's handbook here. Hear what the Lord says.

It is mine to obey. It is his to provide. The children of Israel were told, come hither and hear the words of the Lord your God. And then one last thing. Joshua went amongst them and said, sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, the Lord will do wonders among you. Now, sanctifying themselves for the children of Israel would be to cleanse themselves. And they would do it with water, and they would do it with the ceremonial rites that they were laid down to. But we have Calvary.

We have the fountain open for sin at Calvary, where we all, if we are to be saved, if we are to see the wonder of the Lord, we must have our sins washed away in that fountain, opened at Calvary for sinners.

[33 : 08] The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sins. We come to Jesus and we freely confess all our sins before him, and we ask him to cleanse us. Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you. If you come to Calvary today, it will be the beginning of a new tomorrow for you, a tomorrow that will never end, a tomorrow that will show you the wonders of the Lord in the plan of salvation for you and for me. May every soul in here be saved. May every soul in here be taken and gathered by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And may we all cross over Jordan safely one day. Amen.

Let us pray. O Lord, we praise thee for the way that thou didst reveal to us in those historical happenings the wonder working of the Lord in his plan of salvation. So we pray and ask that we would not hide anything by our own deliberations upon the truth, that we would see clearly the hand of the the loving God reaching out to us in the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, asking us to believe and be saved.

Bless each one of us for Jesus' sake. Amen.