



Joshua 3-4 Let's Cross this Jordan!

Chuck Colson made a keen observation that "Western society has been obsessed with the search for self." He adds, this

obsession to "find ourselves" has spawned a whole set of counterfeit values; we worship fame, success, materialism, and celebrity. We want to "live for success" as we "look out for number one," and we don't mind "winning through intimidation"

But, the church is in almost as much trouble as the culture, for the church has bought into the same value system: fame, success, materialism and celebrity. We watch the leading churches and the leading Christians for our cues. We want to emulate the best-known preachers with the biggest sanctuaries and the grandest edifices.

Preoccupation with these values has also perverted the church's message. . . . "We give the people what they want." This heresy is at the root of the most dangerous message preached today: the what's-in-it-for-me gospel.

The "victorious Christian life" has become man's victorious life, not God's. . . . This is not just a religious adaptation of the look-out-for-number-one, winner-take-all, God helps those who help themselves gospel of our culture; it is heresy. (Charles W. Colson, *Loving God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983, pp. 13-14).

But I am convinced there is a better way of life than this spiritual rat race that ends up on a fast road to nowhere with a lot of glitter, but little substance. Where do you find an authentic intimate love relationship with God without all the glitter and carnality? Where do you find authentic discipleship?

Our major goal in life is to know and experience God. While a senior in high school I made a commitment that I would live to the hilt of every situation I believed to be the will of God. The passion of my heart is still the same. I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. I press on daily toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Do I really want to know Him? Do I want to understand who He is and His purpose for my life? Do I want to understand how He sees my circumstances and station in life? Do I humbly yield to Him the desires of my life?

The more I am around Jesus the more I want to be like Him. I want His kind of life. The more I get to know Christ the more I get to know myself. I realize there is more of the Christ-life available for me. I need to go in and take possession of what God has given me in Christ. The apostle Paul is quoting the prophet Isaiah with these words of encouragement for the believer. "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

God has provided for us His kind of life in Christ Jesus. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). Kenneth Wuest expanded the translation to bring

out the depth of Jesus' words: "I alone came in order that they might be possessing life, and that they might be possessing it in superabundance." The Lord God has provided everything we need to faithfully live the Christian life.

The book of Joshua makes an excellent analogy of knowing and experiencing God in the Christian's daily life. The historical crossing of the Jordan River illustrates beautifully our present inheritance in Christ. The Christian's Promised Land is full of privileges to be enjoyed by all born again believers. God invites us, indeed commands us to appropriate our vital union with Christ. Am I appropriating my resources in Christ? Am I drawing from His power and strength to live Christ?

Many of us are facing some turbulent waters at springtime flood stages in our personal and spiritual lives. The Jordan is a picture of death, the dark river of judgment. The crossing is a beautiful analogy of the believer's death with Christ and the resurrection life in Him.

The moment we put our faith in Jesus as our personal Savior we have everything in Christ. The Holy Spirit invites us to come and take possession of it.

THE PROMISED RESOURCES

For three days before crossing the Jordan River the children of Israel looking out over the flooding river. It is overflowing its banks. Can you imagine what is going on in their minds? What were they thinking? We are going to cross that river!

Remember God told Joshua to go in and take the land. "Cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel" (Joshua 1:2). With God's promises come God's provisions. The land was God's gift to Israel. Verse three says, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses" (Joshua 1:3).

Yeah, Joshua, you talk big talk. How are we going to do it? Yahweh said, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5).

How big is your God Joshua? How big is your God children of Israel? How big is your God Wil Pounds? The problem is not are you qualified, but a willingness to be used of God. It is not position of power, but an intimate abiding relationship with the LORD. Put your own name in this promise. Claim it by faith. "Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you Wil Pounds; I will not fail you or forsake you." Let Joshua 1:6-9 sink in. "Have I not commanded you [Wil Pounds]? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (v. 9). Go back in your spare time, reread these verses, and personalize them. Jesus said, ". . . lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." That fact is still true.

God's promises means God's provision. Ask the Lord for strength and encouragement in your walk with Him. He will make you strong. Obey God's message of instruction and guidance as

you find it in His Word. Remind yourself often that the Lord is within you. He has promised to go before you. Surrender your life to Him. Make a once-for-all commitment of your life to Christ, and then daily give each day to Him. Follow His leading in every area of your life and you will experience Him.

Stake your claim. All of the Lord Jesus is mine at conversion, but I possess only as much as I claim by faith. Great saints were great receivers. The apostle Paul was a great receiver. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:3-4).

As you realize your identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, you enter in to a life of joy and victory as you claim your privilege as His follower. You have the Holy Spirit living within you to empower you and guide you.

We have the precious promised resources of God for our daily Christian life, and the power of God's deliverance.

THE POWERFUL DELIVERANCE

The two spies came back from Rahab's place at Jericho with their report to Joshua. "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us" (Joshua 2:24). That was a completely different report than what Moses received from twelve spies 40 years earlier.

Joshua gives instructions to the people for crossing in three days.

"Then Joshua got up early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they spent the night there before they crossed. Then at the end of three days the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. However, there shall be a distance between you and it of about two thousand cubits by measurement. Do not come near it, so that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before" (Joshua 3:1-4).

In Joshua 3:5. Joshua commanded the people to "consecrate" themselves, "for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among us" (3:5). The word (*qadash*) "consecrate" means to make holy or to sanctify, to be set apart. The idea is to be set apart for God's service. Here it means to consecrate yourselves, set yourselves apart for God's use. It is the responsibility of the individual to reserve himself for God. He is dedicated, reserved for God's purposes.

God wants us to make a once-and-for-all consecration of ourselves to Him. What infinite joy to be reserved for His eternal purposes. With that consecration to Him the Christian life becomes a daily, moment by moment walk with Him every day.

God calls us to sanctify ourselves. He calls His people to holiness, separation from sin and walking in the Holy Spirit. God wants consecrated, clean, empty vessels that He can pour Himself into and use for His glory. We hinder the power of God when we are defiled and full of ourselves. God is holy and He wants us to be set apart for Himself. We need to remove the barriers to God's power and fellowship and prepare our hearts to receive His grace. He invites us to come again to claim the cleansing of the precious blood of Jesus, which washes away all our uncleanness and sin. With a fresh sense of fellowship with Him, He enables us to be used of God. Is there some sin that needs to be confessed and forsaken? You know where God is at work in your heart. Please obey Him. God is not going to work in all His fullness in our lives if we are unwilling to be open to His cleansing and His leadership. However, He will do wonders in us and we will experience Him if we sanctify ourselves.

A very faithful believer and businessman in a former pastorate said to me recently, "Bro. Will, the most important thing I ever learned was the day you emphasized that God wanted us to consecrate our lives to Him in a once-for-all unreserved commitment to Him. Then begin each day asking Him to take our lives and live His life through us, to lead us, and guide us throughout the day. Man that revolutionized my Christian life. Everyday is a new experience with Him. You can then walk moment by moment with Christ. Keep teaching that great truth to your congregation."

God's Presence is with us.

"Then Joshua said to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do miracles among you.' And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, 'Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people. So they took up the Ark of the Covenant and went ahead of the people'" (Joshua 3:5-6).

The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned fifteen times in chapters three and four of Joshua. The Ark of the Covenant symbolized God's presence with His people. God demanded that the people treat the Ark with the same respect they treated Him. It symbolized His holy presence with them, and that He was personally leading them. The nearer we live to God the greater will be our respect and reverence for Him.

Joshua reassured the people that the LORD would be the first to cross the Jordan and the people would follow Him. They must follow the LORD across the Jordan. He will do wonders for the people. He has demonstrated His ability to provide for them for forty years. Now He will demonstrate that they do not go in their own strength, but in His strength. They were not to run ahead of the Ark. They were to follow a half-mile behind it (Joshua 3:4). They were to keep their eyes on the Ark ahead of them. It would lead them and point them in the right direction.

The LORD wants to lead us into new experiences. We, too often, want to go dashing out ahead of Him. On the other hand, just as bad, we drag our feet and are forever making up excuses for not following. Are we walking hand in hand with Him? Where is God at work in our lives? Where is He leading? Do we expect God to work a miracle?

I can hear them now, "We have not been this way before." Joshua, "We have never done it this way before." The future is always unknown and uncertain. Only God knows the future. "These people possessed the Ark before. Yes, but had not followed the Ark, but the cloud; and they would never see it again; the cloud of fire by night, and the midst and mystery by day had ceased. They had a new pathway to tread, with a different method of guidance. They who had waited for the moving of the cloud were now to wait for the moving of the Ark and the priests. The cloud was the provision for the wilderness. God was changing His method with them. They were to live not by a particular sign, but by the word of the Lord. They would never forget that the Ark came out of the cloud" (G. Campbell Morgan).

At what level are we prepared to meet God? He wants people who are committed to Him. Are we willing to consecrate ourselves and follow Him into the unknown adventure of intimate fellowship? The unknown is always scary.

Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God.

Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God. He is God with us. The Ark was the symbol of the Presence of Yahweh with His people. The Lord Jesus is the reality of the divine Presence with men. He is Immanuel—God with us. Christ is the reality of God with His people. The Ark of the Covenant symbolized that God had entered into a covenant with His people Israel. It was a covenant of grace. God chose them. Moreover, God has entered a covenant relationship with us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as the people of Israel were to follow Yahweh into the Jordan as He opened the way before them, we believers of the Lord Jesus Christ follow Him through the dark murky swollen waters of judgment and rise with Him to sit in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. As the Shepherd, Jesus becomes the Ark that guides us. He guides and directs His chosen people. Jesus says to us, "If you love Me you will obey Me." We don't have any problem obeying Him if we love Him. We will always be at the center of God's will if we follow Him one day at a time. He has promised to never leave us, nor forsake us.

The Ark leading the people into the Jordan reminds us of Jesus going down into the dark waters of the wrath of God. Christ rolled away the dark waters of judgment for everyone who believes on Him for salvation.

Do you face a cold slimy Jordan today? Here is your river of opportunity. It may be some habit, or passion, or lust, or pride, an unloving spirit, judgmental attitude, critical spirit or sensitiveness or just plain ugly selfishness. Why do you halt? Where is God at work? Why do you wait? He bids you and me to come and follow. Let's enter into some new spiritual land and

conquer some spiritual giants in our lives. What do you want to be like as a Christian ten years from now?

It is time to get your feet wet.

Joshua tells us in 3:6 the very moment the priest's feet touched the water the Jordan dried up to allow the people to cross. The priest took up rods of gold that suspended the Ark of the Covenant and crossed over ahead of the people (v. 6). The priests came to the edge of the water and stood still in the Jordan. The Jordan did not dry up before the priests stepped into the water. As the priests stepped into the waters, the river sixteen miles upstream at Adam piled up in a heap. They would have stood there all day waiting if they had not stepped out by faith and put their feet into the Jordan. God waited on them for 39 years in their unbelief before they were willing to cross over with Him.

Joshua 3:7-13 reads:

Now the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they will know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. So you shall command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the Lord your God." And Joshua said, "By this you will know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly drive out from you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan. Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe. And it will come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, that is, the waters which are flowing down from above; and they will stand in one heap."

Picture in your mind's eye the scene before the people. Two million people are at the river banks looking on with wonder at what God is doing before their eyes.

How would you like to have been the high priest in the lead carrying the front end of the Ark on its poles? Are you ready to step in by faith and trust the LORD at the river's edge? Are you ready to get your feet wet?

Joshua 3:14-17 tells us:

So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan, with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, and when those who were carrying the ark came up to the Jordan and the feet of the priests carrying the ark stepped down into the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), then the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea

of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

They had to get their feet wet. They had to get out into the water. Can you imagine if you were the priest in the lead as you took that first step? Wouldn't that have been fun? As you walk out into the water and take that first step . . . Wow! Where did the water go? Come on yawl. Let's go!

How many times do we come to new experiences with God and He patiently waits for us to step out by faith? And waits, and waits and waits. He waits for us to get our feet wet. We have no way of knowing how God will provide or lead or deliver us and when we step out by faith He does it. When we trust Him, He does it. God gives us exactly what we need when we need it. His timing is always perfect. When we obey Him, we experience Him.

Don't you know those faithful priests had fun talking about that experience in the years to come. I saw God do it! And you did, too.

PLACE OF REMEMBRANCE

Joshua 4:1 tells us "the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua."

At God's command the Jordan River returned to its flow over its flood banks.

Now the Lord said to Joshua, "Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan." So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." It came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before" (Joshua 4:15-18).

Can you see them standing back and watching those waters return to their previous flood stage? There is no turning back. They cannot retreat and go back over Jordan.

Two memorials were set up in Joshua chapter four. God told Joshua to select twelve men, one from each tribe to pick up a stone from the Jordan and carry it to the other side of the river. There they built a monument of remembrance to God's faithfulness at Gilgal (Joshua 4:1-7).

Joshua had a second set of stones set up where the priest's feet were standing firm in the river carrying the Ark. Why did they do that? Verse six tells us it was show and tell time. The children yet to be born would ask, "What do these stone mean to you?" These stones were to become a memorial of Israel crossing Jordan in the springtime at flood season. "And he said to the sons of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are

these stones?' then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground'" (Joshua 4:21-22).

What a testimony! All two million people who crossed the Jordan can say with all their hearts, "I saw God do it!" For centuries to come every time they passed Gilgal they would retell the story of God doing just what He said He would do. Now three thousand years later here we are telling it again.

"For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever" (Joshua 4:23-24).

The people had two memorials to remind them of how God provided for them, and how He delivered them. How easy it is to forget God's provisions and deliverances in our lives.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. The crossing of the Jordan beautifully pictures our passing from one level of Christian living to another. Let's arm ourselves with our spiritual weapons and take the land God has promised us. Let's obey Him and experience Him every hour, every day. As we walk by faith, He fulfills in us what He asks us to do. It doesn't happen automatically. God was saying to Israel, "The land is already your land, now walk in it. Take it. Claim it. Possess it." The priests were obedient. They stepped out into the water, stood in the middle of the river, and waited for all the people to pass over. Unless we are willing to step out and get our feet wet, God can never open the way for us. God honors people of faith. Where is God at work in your life today? Where does He want you to grow spiritually? What new area in your sanctification is He working? Does He have you at the river's edge leading you into a new challenging ministry that scares you to death? Perhaps now is the time to step out by faith and follow Him.

2. When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan, they were cut off from their old life. Those who chose to go over into the Promised Land began a new life from that day on with a new identification. At the Jordan River they were cut off from all the old pagan Egyptian life style and wilderness wandering. Israel as a nation had a new identity, new law and a new life in the land. There was no need to go back across the river. The old life style was buried under the waters of the Jordan. That old life was dead. They came up out of the Jordan to start a new life in a new land.

That describes our death, burial and resurrection with Christ because we have been so identified with Christ. We have been baptized into Christ meaning we have been placed into Christ and identified with Him. We have gone through what Christ went through in His death, burial and resurrection. We are so identified with Christ that He not only died for our sins, but we died with Him.

The apostle Paul described our new identification with Christ as being "crucified with Him," buried with Him and risen with Him. "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). Be constantly counting upon the fact, reckoning "yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." That will revolutionize your life.

That is the heart of living the Christian life. We are now identified with Christ in His death. When He died, I died. We have been buried with Him, and we have been raised to newness of life with Him. When I choose to act upon that truth, I experience Him in a new quality of life. It is the resurrection life.

"Therefore," writes the apostle Paul, "we have been buried together with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised together from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might habitually walk in newness of life. For if we have become permanently united, grown together in an intimate progressive union, with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died once and for all with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Pounds paraphrase).

3. What kind of monuments are you building? We are all building monuments. Some are to self and vainglory. Some are religious monuments to humanism. What kind of monuments are you building to God? Are they monuments to men or to God? Who is the getting the glory and the applause? I seriously doubt if God appreciates a lot of applause we supposedly offer up to Him. I rather think He would have us sit in silence and awe of Him, contemplating His glory. Yes, there is a time to clap and sing.

We have two powerful monuments of God's provision for every believer. They are the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are testimonies of what God has done for you and me. Our Savior died and we died with Him. He went down through the cold, murky waters of God's wrath and died for our transgressions and He came up out of the bonds of death. When He died we died, and when He rose from the dead, we rose from the dead. God sees every believer dead, buried and risen with Christ. Your baptism by immersion pictures what God did for you in Christ. It does not save you. It does not add one dot to your salvation. It is a memorial to God for what He has already done in you. The Lord's table is a memorial of Christ's death on your behalf, dying as your substitute, bearing the wrath of God in your place.

This afternoon take a piece of paper and draw a time line across the page. Begin your spiritual time line with the day you were born again. Mark the place and date on your time line. Then add those important precious events and dates when you have watched the Holy Spirit intervene in your life and bring you to great moments in sanctification in your life. Mark those events when you have watched Him do great and mighty things in your Christian life. Jot down those events when you have called upon the Lord and He has opened the doors of opportunity to serve Him. Jot down when you have watched God work in your life, your family, your church, and you can only respond saying, "I saw God do it."

4. We must keep our eyes focused on Jesus Christ in order to cross the "Jordan's" of this life. God went before His people in the presence of the Ark, and He opened a dry road across the river. He has promised to not only save us from eternal punishment, but to lead, guide protect and provide for us. We are in a lifelong process of following Him deeper and deeper into His life. The journey has only begun when we trust Christ as our Savior. Let's go across this Jordan and grow in our knowledge and grace in our Lord Jesus. Only Christ is capable of leading us through the dark waters of Jordan. Let's draw our strength from Him. The Lord has promised us that He will go with us just as He was with Joshua. Do you have stones of remembrance in your life? Have you chosen some stone out of your Jordan to remind you of His grace?

Title: Joshua 3-4 Let's Cross this Jordan!

Series on Joshua <http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/index.html>

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