



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

So Much to Learn

May 23, 2021

Joshua 3

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3 Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. ² At the end of three days the officers went through the camp ³ and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. ⁴ Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." ⁵ Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." ⁶ And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

⁷ The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. ⁸ And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ⁹ And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰ And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. ¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. ¹² Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. ¹³ And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."

¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

(Pastor prays)

Samuel Stennett Grew up in a preacher's home. His dad was a part of the dissenting movement in late 17th Century England. Stennett himself became a Baptist pastor, and through many struggles and persecutions, preached the Gospel in a time when being a dissenter or Baptist was not socially advantageous. One of the gifts that Stennett had was writing hymns, and probably his best-known hymn is *Bound for the Promised Land*, inspired by Joshua chapters 3-4. That song starts out like this: "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye to Canaan's fair and happy land where my possessions lie."

Here they are. Finally ready to walk into the realization of all that God had promised. And as much as this passage is about Joshua as a leader and Israel as a people, this passage is about a good God...Our God and His amazing love and care for His people, people like us with needs like ours in a world like this one. And what I want to do today is to convince you that the God of the Bible is good and full of grace toward His people in Christ so that you can live confidently in this present age knowing that...

You Can Trust Our Good God

But to do so there are some things we need to learn, and I think this passage helps us in that.

There's so much more we need to learn about God

This story is besotted with language about God. For instance we find out that...

He is a **personal** God. In verses 1-3 Joshua and the people move to the banks of the Jordan and stay there 3 days. Pick up with me in verses 2-3. ²*At the end of three days the officers went through the camp* ³*and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it.*

The LORD, YHWH, your God. That is the personal name, YHWH, of your personal God. He is to be known and enjoyed and embraced. And for us in the new covenant that means we know God through faith in His son Jesus. Isn't that what Jesus told the disciples? "If you have seen me, you have seen the father." That in Christ, God sees, knows and cares for who you are personally including all of your personal baggage, hang-ups and fears. Do you know him personally in Jesus?

He is a **sovereign** God. The people were to follow the Ark of the Covenant but they had no idea they would be going into the river or how they would cross. Look with me at how God is described in verses 11-12. ¹¹ *Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan.* ¹² *Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man.*

The Lord of all the earth. All things belong to Him and He has absolute control over all things. This is exactly what Paul said about Jesus in Colossians 1:17. ¹⁷ *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

When you are bought by the blood of Jesus, you are in Christ and Christ is Lord over all matter, existence and people. He has not forgotten you, and your life is not a random series of unconnected events. There is a plan and He is working out that plan according to the counsel of His own will. You can trust Him . He didn't save you just to leave you feeling aimless in this world. He is a personal God and He is a sovereign God.

He is a **moral** God. So many times in this passage we see mention of the Ark of the Covenant which would symbolize the presence of God. The Ark is important for several reasons. What was in the Ark was Aaron's rod that budded, manna and tablets containing the 10 Commandments, the moral law. This meant that God's people would be different and set aside from all other people in the world. And ultimately that law would show us how far short we fall from God's holiness and our absolute need for the Gospel.

The Gospel of Jesus is good news. The Gospel of Jesus is good news for people who understand the bad news. So what is the bad news? The bad news is that we are sinners by choice and destined for Hell. The good news is that, in Jesus, we are predestined for adoption as sons and daughters of God. The moral law shows us that we are sinners in need of a savior, and that savior is Jesus. Jesus lived perfectly, died on the cross in the place of sinners. God raised Him from the dead and, here's the Gospel, any sinner who believes that can be saved.

I could keep going on and on about things we could learn about God. Just look at verse 10. He is called the living God because He would go with His people to a land where all the Canaanite gods are dead. If you go up to verses 4-5, you find out He's a holy God. Don't get too close and consecrate yourselves.

You could look into the Ark and be reminded He is a providing God. The manna is there to remind us that He is a providing God.

In verse 7 we see He is a **present** God. Look at the personal word of assurance He gives to Joshua. ⁷ *The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you."*

The most important word you can think about in your relationship with God is the word "with." Let's make a word up – the *withness* of God. What great assurance there is in knowing that God is *with* you in a real, tangible and immediate way. My favorite is in verse 5 when Joshua tells the people that tomorrow God will do wonders among them. God is going to perform a miracle. The miracle will be taking almost a million people through a dangerous river at flood stage that should have killed them all. This reminds us that our God is mighty to save when we can't save ourselves. You can trust our good God. There is so much we need to learn about God.

There is so much we need to learn about obedience

You see the instructions in verses 3-4. They are to watch the Ark of the Covenant and follow it as the priests carry it. In verse 4 they are told to maintain a distance of about 1,000 yards as they go up to the edge of the river. And none of this would make any real sense to the people. All they know was that the Ark of the Covenant symbolized the very presence of God. And their instructions were: you keep your eye on the Ark and not the river. And wherever the Ark goes, you go, even if it doesn't make sense. And that's exactly what they did. They obeyed God even when it's not logical, sensical or even safe. And one of the lessons we need to learn is obedience to God even when it costs you financially, socially and educationally. When it costs you personally. It is a real willingness to trust God and His word even when it really doesn't make good sense.

We have entered into a time in history unlike the American Christianity before us. It's already happening in Canada and it's starting to happen here, if you live out your convictions—and I mean basic Christian convictions.

I preached at the Hickory Grove Christian School Graduation on Friday night. Those graduating are headed into a world that despises the Christian view on manhood and womanhood. And not only that, there is coming a day when it won't be enough that you remain silent. You will be called on to affirm and celebrate the LGBTQ worldview. And when you don't because of your

Christian convictions, it will be costly. It's good for us now to learn more and more about what it means to be obedient to the Lord as a 21st Century Christian. That will require trust. You can trust our good God. You need to learn about God. You need to learn about obedience.

There's so much we need to learn about patience

Waiting. Go back with me to the beginning of the passage. The people of God have been waiting for a generation to go into the promised land, and they start moving and get to the river and wait. Read it with me in verses 1-2. **3** *Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.* **2** *At the end of three days the officers went through the camp. Three days they stood there and waited and looked and worried and wondered "how in the world are we ever going to make it across this river?"*

What are the lessons of waiting? We learn the frailty of the human condition. We learn we are not in control, and so much of the world is bigger than us all beyond what we can control. We learn humility. We learn that our plans and schedules and expectations always take a back seat to what God plans and schedules.

A. Maclaren says God often opens His hand one finger at a time. It's enough to see the next step and trust God for what we can't see. We learn dependence. There was no way to get all those people and children across that river unless God did it. Delays and waiting reminds us of our absolute dependence on God. And it's in the holding pattern in the waiting, that's where we learn to trust Him. Are you learning it? Are you walking by faith and not by sight? There is so much we need to learn about God. There is so much we need to learn about obedience. There is so much we need to learn about patience. You can trust our good God.

There is so much we need to learn about God's power

In verse 5 Joshua told the people, God is going to do wonders among you. Let's read the account in verses 13-17. **13** *And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."*

¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

It was like crossing the Red Sea. Verse 15 says it was in flood stage. Verse 16 says there were heaps of water. Verse 17 says the priest stood on dry ground twice. ¹⁷ Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. It was as if to say: I not doing this halfway. It was a *bona fide*, certified, God-centered miracle of grace to remind us of God's power and love and affection and care for His people. I'd be remiss if I didn't add just one more thing.

There's so much we need to learn about Jesus

When you read about Joshua at the Jordan River and then you read what God says to him in verse 7, you have a clear foreshadowing of the true and better Joshua: Jesus, who came to the Jordan River and began His ministry to save sinners from the Jordan. He was baptized at the Jordan River. And from the Jordan River He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and takes on the sin of every sinner who will be saved. And He took them to the Cross of Calvary. Every one of those steps tells us that we can trust our good God, and that's what I'm asking you to do today. Trust Him. Bow your heads and close your eyes. Trust God with your future. Trust God with your problems. Trust God with decisions you need to make. Trust God with your children. Trust God to save you.

(Pastor prays)