

It has been called the greatest rescue mission of World War II.

Late in that war, American bombers were sent on dangerous missions over southern Europe to cripple the Nazis' oil supplies. Hundreds of crews in flying tin cans soared through storms of anti-aircraft shells. Many American pilots were forced to bail from their shot-up planes. The injured airmen drifted by parachute into occupied Yugoslavia, expecting to be captured or killed.

Instead, on the ground remarkable rescue teams were already in place. Serbian peasants tracked the path of the floating flight crews. Their sole mission was to grab the flyboys and bring them to safety—before the Nazis arrived.

Risking their own lives, the peasants fed and sheltered the downed soldiers. These rescued men were in friendly hands but on enemy soil. They still needed to escape.

The story of what became known as Operation Haylard builds toward a daring mission, a secret landing strip, and a clandestine evacuation plan. Amazingly, those Serbian peasants rescued every single American airman—over 500 in all.

Here's the fascinating subplot to the rescue. To travel to the evacuation site, the airmen had to spend weeks following the Serbian freedom fighters, who alone knew the path to the evacuation site. Despite the profound language barriers, the direction, the pace, and the destination were in the hands of their rescuers. The men had been saved from their enemy, but the journey had just begun. They still had to walk to freedom.

The story of Operation Halyard sheds light on an important spiritual reality: to be rescued *from* something sets us on the path *toward* something.

For the airmen it was a journey of survival. For us it's a journey of faith. The One who saved us is now calling us to walk. It's nonnegotiable. Though snatched from spiritual death, we soon discover that the Christian life isn't an arrival; it's an adventure. Christ rescues us then he points us to the path of following him.

Two weeks ago... we launched into a new study in the Old Testament book of Joshua. ... The book of Joshua focuses on taking possession of the Land of Canaan. Canaan represented the Christian life as it ought to be. It is not a picture of Heaven. Some songs portray the crossing of Jordan as going to Heaven. This is not scriptural. The events in the book of Joshua deal with the life of God's people, not death.

Canaan represents the life of the believer as it should be because it is a place of spiritual conflict and victory; faith and obedience; spiritual riches and rest. The *rest* of Canaan is the experience of Christians who *yield* everything to Christ and claim their inheritance by faith.

In Egypt, the enemy was around them. When they crossed the Red Sea, the enemy was behind them. When they crossed the Jordan, the enemy was before them. The Christian life is a battleground. If you do not understand this truth, you are probably not taking a stand for Christ and serving Him. **Canaan Land was not Heaven, it was a place of conflict.**

To arrive into Canaan Land, the nation of Israel had to cross the Jordan River. This would be the second crossing of water that would require a

miracle of God. The first crossing was the Red Sea. Each crossing has a significant message, teaching, and contrast.

The Red Sea

1. A picture of deliverance from the bondage of sin.
2. A picture of Salvation.
3. Signifies deliverance from sin.
4. People are going out.
5. Israel did not have to fight. God did it all.
6. No threat from the Egyptian enemy after the crossing. They were secure. We are eternally secure.

The Jordan River

1. A picture of believers claiming their inheritance in Jesus Christ.
2. A picture of Sanctification. Salvation comes before sanctification.
3. Signifies dedication to the Savior.
4. People are going in.
5. Israel was involved in battle. They had to conquer their enemies with God's help.
6. The threat lied ahead from internal enemies. Sin leads to defeat.

Crossing the Jordan demonstrated that the self-centered and carnal life would be left behind in order to walk by faith and conquer in victory. They

were victorious until they became disobedient. What is your Jordan? What needs to be left behind in your life? What is causing you to walk in the wilderness? What is your river or obstacle? Do you have a lingering love for a worldly lifestyle? Are old bad habits, uncontrolled desires, temper, bitterness, jealousy, or greed quenching your spiritual desires? What do you need to cross in order to be victorious in your Christian life, walk by faith, and grow in the Lord? What is keeping you from keeping your feet wet? By faith claim God's promises and power and overcome your river by God's grace. Get your feet wet!

The book of Joshua shows that Christians are either *overcomers* or *overcomed*. We are *victors* or *victims*. We will move forward in faith or backward in unbelief and sin. We either stand on the bank of the river or get our feet wet.

The theme of Joshua is the same as the book of Hebrews, Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians... and 2 Peter. ... Ephesians, Hebrews, and 2 Peter... all associate rest... with inevitable conflict... that we believers must expect ... All three of these books were written to believers... exhorting them to go onward in spiritual maturity... and not backward in unbelief... which many of the 1st Century readers were wanting to do. ... We are to go forward by faith! ... And our exhortation from Joshua for the next few weeks will be— "Step Out! Get your feet wet!"

Unbelief says, "Let's get back where it is safe."

Faith says, "Let's go forward where God is working."

Unbelief says, "I can't. This is too hard. It doesn't work! This is stupid!"

Faith says, "I can do all things through Christ."

Unbelief will say, "I wish I had obeyed, trusted, and believed God."

Faith will say, "I fought a good fight, I finished my course, I kept the faith. By the grace of God, I am what I am."

Faith obeys in spite of the consequences, no matter what happens.

Hebrews 11 demonstrates that living faith leads to *action*. James said, "Without works, faith is dead." (James 2:26) Get your feet wet! The book of Joshua reveals the process of becoming what we *ought* to be.

As we open the third chapter of Joshua today... God is preparing the Israelites to cross over the flooded Jordan River. He is getting them ready to "step into the water..." The remainder of chapter three as well as chapter four... will be concerned with this crossing.

But as we study... let me say again... we must keep in mind that the Book of Joshua deals with much more than ancient history—what God did centuries ago for the Jews. It's about your life and the life of the church today—what God wants to do here and now for those who trust Him. The Book of Joshua is about the victory of faith and the glory that comes to God when His people trust and obey.

In the Christian life you're either an *overcomer* or you're *overcome*, a victor or a victim. After all, God didn't save us to make statues out of us and put us on exhibition. He saved us to make soldiers out of us and move us forward by faith to claim our rich inheritance in Jesus Christ. Moses said it

perfectly: "He brought us out...that He might bring us in" (Deut. 6:23). Too many of God's people have the mistaken idea that salvation—being delivered from the bondage of Egypt—is all that's involved in the Christian life; but salvation is only the beginning.

No... Joshua is more than just a historical account of what God did in ancient times for His covenant people. It's also about each of our individual lives and the life of the church today, about what God wants to do here and now for those who trust him and who are open to his leading. The book of Joshua is about the victory of faith and the glory that comes to God when His people are willing to get their feet wet... because they trust Him and obey Him. ... Sadly... too often we are... in the words of the writer of Hebrews (3:19), "...not able to enter because of unbelief."

In the opening verses of Joshua chapter 3... God illustrates for us three essentials for moving ahead by faith... and claiming all that He has for us. We will focus on what God had Israel do... and also what He desires for us.

First... the Israelites were directed to wait on the Lord... even though... it must have been excessively difficult for them to wait. ... Second... they were directed to keep their eyes on God and follow the Lord unconditionally. ... And third... they were directed to do something that is a very unpopular instruction for believers today... ... to consecrate themselves before the Lord.

Joshua 3:1-6

The first thing that I notice in today's passage is that verse one starts off... "*Then Joshua rose early in the morning...*" ... Why are we told that...? What does this detail add... that is important to the story...? As a matter of fact... three more times in the book of Joshua... we find it mentioned again. In Joshua 6:12... just before the final walk around Jericho when the walls fell down... "*Joshua rose early in the morning.*" In Joshua 7:16... just before doing his detective work to determine who had sinned and caused the Lord's anger... just before he had discovered that it was Achan... and had him punished... "*Joshua rose early in the morning...*" And in Joshua 8:10... after they dealt with Achan's sin which had caused them to lose a battle with Ai... and just before they went back up against Ai... this time to defeat them... "*Joshua rose early in the morning...*"

Joshua certainly was not lazy or reluctant. ... Although it does not directly say this... I believe Joshua was meditating on God's Word. Remember Joshua 1:8... "*On this Book of the Law you shall meditate both day and night so that you may be careful to do all that is in it... For then you will make your way prosperous... and then you will have good success...*"

Each of these were times when Joshua needed the certainty of success. I think Joshua was just like other men of God... who we know were early risers for this very reason: Moses (Ex. 24:4; 34:4)... David (Ps. 57:8; 119:147)... Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:20)... and our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 1:35; Isa. 50:4). ... It's impossible to live by faith and ignore the Word of God and prayer. ... (LISTEN) faith is nurtured by worship and the Word. The people God uses and blesses know how to discipline their bodies so that they can give themselves to the Lord in the early morning hours.

As Joshua got himself dialed-into God's leading... Joshua brought the people of Israel to the water's edge of the Jordan River... where they would just stare at it's overflowing banks for three days.

These three days of waiting at the Jordan River were days of preparation for crossing it. They describe the kind of people that God wanted the Israelites to be and the kind of people he yearns for us to be. This issue of waiting is addressed in the last phrase of verse 1 and the first phrase of verse 2: "*...and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of three days....*" ...Anyone who has ever flown on an international flight knows this sense of - "Hurry up and wait." *Common'-common'-common' ! OK... now sit here for several hours.* ...That's what Israel was experiencing at the Jordan.... Only it wasn't hours... it was THREE DAYS!

Their march from Shittim to the Jordan... was about a ten-mile journey... So it would have taken them about a day to mobilize... travel... and arrive at the banks of the Jordan. Then they were ordered to make camp again... to await further instructions... and that wait was three days. ... The people were ready to move when the command was given... but then they were asked to wait for Joshua's instructions from the Lord to be transmitted through the officers.

As they waited... they had a growing awareness of the human impossibility of what God was asking them to do. ... The nation must have wondered what Joshua was working out in this interim period. ... They certainly couldn't swim across the river. They couldn't build enough boats or rafts to transport almost two million people, including women and children, across

to the other side. Besides, either of those approaches would have made them sitting ducks for the Canaanite enemies on the other side. ... For forty years they had cultivated deep fears about the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. ... In addition... God intentionally brought them to the Jordan at the time of year when the river was swollen by the spring rains... and by the melting snows from the Lebanon mountains. ... It was at this time... when the people were faced with tremendous difficulties and they knew that they were at the end of their resources... that God... absolutely MUST show His power.

There must have been a lot of conflicting thoughts going through the minds of the people waiting through those three days... just as there are for us when we're faced with our own inadequacy... and impotence to have any effect whatsoever on circumstances. ... There is no doubt in my mind that some of God's people would have said... "*...Ahhh... I-don't-know about this... ... Let's go back to Shittim. ... After all... Shittim is a lush oasis of acacia groves... a beautiful setting... ...Why don't we simply spread out with the two and a half tribes... and take over Bashan, Gilead, and Moab... right here on the East-side of the River. We're already here, after all.*" ... How many of us... would have opted for the safer option... instead of moving forward... and following God by faith...? ... Whatever was going through their minds... God had them face-to-face with an overflowing river that was about the size of the Mississippi... a little larger than our own Columbia River... with no observable way for them all to cross. ... And then... once they are in... they would have been trapped with their backs against the River and their enemies to the front.

There is a similar tension for the disciples of Jesus implied at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts, after his resurrection and his ascension into heaven. Jesus had said, "

Luke 24:49 (ESV)

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Forty days the disciples had to wait for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit... the resource they needed to live a life of overcoming faith. Remember, the power of God was demonstrated for the church at Pentecost, and it would be demonstrated here for Israel on the fourth day at the Jordan in a miraculous crossing over into the promised land. But waiting on the Lord is hard to do.

Today marks the end of a rather long wait for us as a church. We are celebrating the end of an 11 year wait period from the time Kevin Ferguson concluded his time as our youth minister... until now... as Tyler will be commissioned as our new Pastor of Student Ministries. But God brought us through a productive and very purposeful wait period. God led us through some important infra-structure changes... from being a Congregational Rule church... to an Elder-led polity. We've been through a name change and a constitution change... and God led us to initiate a mission agency (Colombia Grace Foundation) which is thriving today.

I truly believe that God was saying: "*Wait. I've got some things I want to accomplish.*"

Learning how to wait for God's timing... is the first element of moving forward in faith. ... Sometimes God calls us to wait.

Now... we all know that sometimes this can be an excuse for not moving out in faith. Sometimes we simply lack faith... and so we convince ourselves... *"This just can't be God's timing. He must want me to wait. I'll know what His timing is once I know all the details for how to make it work..."* The assumption often is... that it can only be God's timing... when I have it all figured out... But that is so foreign to the waiting God had His people do... on the banks of the Jordan. They were not waiting until they had certainty... through a reasonable plan for crossing. No... God had them wait... so they could recognize the impossibility of their crossing... God needed to impact their hearts with His power and ability... so the Israelites would accomplish their task of driving out the Canaanites from Land of Canaan. And I believe that God has wants to do the same with many believers today... who face impossible circumstances. Right now... they are called to wait... but it is not a matter of waiting until they've got it all figured out. But how do we know when it is time to take action...?

This is where we come to the next thing God instructs them to do.

In the period of waiting at the Jordan... God gave the nation of Israel another specific instruction. ... Obedience to this... will mark the lives of a people who are open to God's leading... just as waiting on the Lord will.

Up until now... the people of Israel had followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night... as symbols of God's leading... presence... and

protection in the wilderness. Now those symbols were going to be replaced by the Ark of the covenant.

Joshua 3:2-4, 6

The Ark of the covenant is mentioned fifteen times in these two chapters about crossing the Jordan River... chapters 3 and 4. ... The ark has fascinated people for more than three thousand years... even inspiring the initial Indiana Jones movie... *Raiders of the Lost Ark* .

The Ark of the Covenant was Israel's most sacred treasure. ... It was a symbol of God's presence and power. ... Let me say that again... because it is absolutely critical: everywhere the ark mentioned in Scripture... it represents God's presence and power... dwelling among the Israelites. ... The Ark was a gold rectangular box with two cherubim (angels) facing each other on the lid. ... Inside the Ark were the tablets of the Ten Commandments Moses received from God... a jar of manna (the bread God miraculously sent from heaven during the wilderness wanderings)... and Aaron's staff (the symbol of the high priest's authority). ... According to God's law... only the Levites could carry the Ark.

Thus the ark symbolized both the covenant commitment that God had made to Israel and the covenant conditions that God had established for the people of Israel. God's power... God's presence... and God's provision... would continue with them as they crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan. ... The jar of manna inside that Ark... symbolized the truth that day after day... for forty years... God had met their physical needs.

The Ark was the sign that God was leading them. They weren't just a migratory people aimlessly wandering into the Land of Canaan. ... God wanted to make sure they had this very powerful reminder that they were God's people... and they were being led by Him. ... They had the assurance of His guidance and leadership... as they moved into the new... completely unfamiliar territory. ... If they didn't follow the Lord... as symbolized by the Ark... they would get lost and disoriented... they wouldn't know where to go or how to live.

What does this remind you of...? What do we possess for this very same reason...? ... The living and active Word of God! It is a lamp unto feet and a light for our path.

The spacing from the ark was so that all could see the ark. The space between the ark and the people was over half a mile. ... They were no longer following a cloud which all could easily see... but an Ark which was on ground level. ... That is why they needed this distance from the Ark... so all could see it and follow it. The distance was essential... so that the largest possible number of this great population could see the Ark. ...God was about to lead them over unfamiliar ground... over a **way** they had not taken **before**. ... It was new territory so without the Lord's guidance and leadership the people would not know which direction to take.

You and I need to know the Word of God. We need to be feeding our souls on it... and allowing it to lead our lives. With every tough (and normal) decision that we make... we ought to stop and consider... are there any principles from God's Word that indicate which direction I should take. ...

And definitely... if we make a decision that we know goes against what God's Word teaches... then we need to abandon that choice immediately. Like the Children of Israel... we need to keep our eyes on it... we need to give our fullest attention to it.

And the Ark was... holy... distinct... The people were instructed to never touch the Ark. It wasn't to be treated carelessly. Here is the implication of that for us. ... God's Word must not be treated lightly! We need to be careful handlers of it... rightly discerning what it says... so that we will not need to be ashamed. It is not open to any interpretation WE may want to foist upon it.

The Ark was to lead the way across the treacherous river and into unfamiliar land. The eyes of the people were to be focused on the presence... the power... and the provision of God... and not on their dangerous circumstances as they crossed the Jordan River.

This issue of following spiritual leadership is difficult. I think every person of faith struggles from time to time with who they should follow... or watch... as their spiritual leadership. ... The pastors and elders of Living Water are given the responsibility to know... to follow... and lead others... according to what Scripture teaches. Knowing God's Word... and obedience to that Word is critical. ... Only follow us... as we follow God's instruction by knowing His Word... and being obedient to it... in all areas of our lives. We need to be claiming the promised land by keeping our eyes on the Lord... through His Holy Word - Scripture. ...And just as importantly – your eyes need to be focused on it too!

Now we come to the third specific instruction given to the Israelites as they waited at the edge of the Jordan. I think that this one... also... has implications for us... to move forward in faith... and for knowing the wait is over... it's time to move.

Joshua 3:5

Joshua gave the Israelites a message of purification which is not a popular message in any day.

Joshua ordered the people to sanctify, consecrate, purify themselves. This meant that the people were to prepare their hearts before the Lord. They were to pray, confess, repent, rededicate, and recommit their lives to God.

All of the external acts that they were instructed to do... take a bath... put on clean clothes... abstain from sexual activity... was symbolism for what was to take place inside their hearts. They were to purify themselves before the Lord. Abstaining from sexual activity was so they could devote their full attention to the Lord. ... Purity still has a high priority in the program of God. ... We are to have times when we regularly enter into deep prayer... full confession of sin... repentance... rededication... and recommitment.

In meeting these expectations we are not earning God's blessing. Rather, we are making certain that our hearts are ready for God's blessing.

When we consecrate ourselves... it symbolizes a new beginning with the Lord. ... God has to cleanse us before we can truly follow Him. ... When Jacob made a new beginning with the Lord and returned to Bethel... he and his entire family washed themselves and changed their garments. And after King David confessed his sin with Bathsheba... he bathed... changed his clothes... and then worshiped God.

Whenever we face new opportunities... God's voice calls us to sanctify ourselves. ... God calls his people to holiness... purity of life... and separation from sin. ... There is no better way for knowing if God is telling us to wait... or to move forward... even if we don't have it all figured out.

For us today... the invitation to be cleansed means that we come once again to claim the cleansing of the precious blood of Jesus Christ... which washes away all defilement... uncleanness... and sin. ... That requires a willingness from us to admit our sin... to live an examined life... to be open to truth. ... It means opening ourselves to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit... because after our confession of sin... repentance... and experiencing forgiveness... then the Holy Spirit enables us to be used by God.

God's Call to the Elders for Consecration

God still calls us to consecrate ourselves today. ... There is an important spiritual principle in Joshua 3:5: God has chosen not to work in all his fullness in the lives of people who are unwilling to open their hearts

to his cleansing and his leadership. God will work wonders in us and through us if we sanctify ourselves.

Let me close with some questions for you to take to the Communion Table that we are about to celebrate.

First... are you struggling with your own helplessness... impotence... or inadequacy as you face your own Jordan River or Jericho or Canaanite enemies? ... In this season of waiting... is there impatience... frustration... and possibly even resentment in your heart... that God is not moving more quickly and doing what you want Him to do on your timetable? ... Have you been struggling to know if He would still have you wait... or is calling you to move into some action...?

Second... do you have your eyes on the Lord... by a careful... and regular study of His Word...?

Finally... are you willing to sanctify yourself today... to confess sin or uncleanness that needs to be washed by the blood of Jesus? ...Are you willing to consecrate yourself anew to God's purposes for you... to experience the wonders that He wants to accomplish in you and through you...? Are you sensing that God has a new opportunity for you...?