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WITH ME IN THE FLOOD

Nothing is Impossible for God

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I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
² He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.
⁴ Blessed is the man who makes
the Lord his trust!

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Announcements:

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WITH ME THE FLOOD

Joshua 3

Introduction

Open your Bible to the book of Joshua. We are in a series called “Safe and Secure in Jesus”. The title of our message is “With Me in the Flood”.

Illustration: You may have to think back quite a ways in your life, perhaps to when you were a child, but I am sure that you can remember the excitement of a day for which you had waited a **very long time** and which had at last arrived. Perhaps it was a **special birthday**. Or your wedding day. Perhaps it was Christmas or the day you and your family were starting off on a vacation. It may have been the birth of your first child. For weeks, perhaps months, you waited. You longed for the day. Then, suddenly, it was there. **It must have been a day like that on which the Israelites finally moved out of the desert across the Jordan River into Canaan.**¹

The children of Israel had come right to the threshold of their Canaan. They were about to cross over the river Jordan. They were about to enter into the land, they were about to possess their inheritance God had promised to them.

God had for them a land that flowed with milk and honey, a land of abundance, a land of great promise, a land of great plenty. But, between them and that land there lay a river of difficulty. It was the river Jordan, and at this time of the year the river was swollen. Before Joshua and the people of Israel could begin their conquest of Canaan, they had to cross the Jordan River. This was no small thing as the river was at **flood tide** (3:15). This wasn't just a little river, it covered a great territory and it was seemingly impossible for them to get through the flooded Jordan River and into the land. But God is a miracle working God, and this day, God performed a miracle. God got them in, even though it seemed impossible.

CONTEXT: CROSSING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Joshua needed to get two million people ready to cross the Jordan at flood level. The children of Israel have come out of Egypt; they've spent 40 years in the wilderness. Joshua

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 35.

was ready to go into the promised land when he was 40. Caleb was ready as well. Now Joshua is 80.

Joshua is getting ready to lead God's people into their inheritance, into the Promise Land. This is the land that flows with...

- milk and honey
- corn and wine
- grapes and pomegranates
- a land of mountains and rivers
- valleys and waterfalls
- sheep and cattle and oxen
- a land of peace and plenty
- a land of prosperity and a land of promise...

This was quite different from Egypt. They are freed! But between them and this great Promised Land was the river Jordan. And it was flood time for the Jordan, like a raging rapid. It still occurs today. It's incredible. This placid little river becomes the raging rapids.

God said to the people, you just watch the ark of the covenant and where the ark goes you go, just follow the ark. And so the priest took that ark. It was a piece of furniture about four feet long and two feet wide and two feet high. They had poles that went through the side of the ark by which they could carry it, and they took that ark, carried it right down to the river Jordan.

The Priests Feet

As soon as the feet of those priests touched the river Jordan, the water stopped flowing and it just started stacking up like it was held up by a plexiglass shield and the ark stopped right there in the middle of the riverbed of Jordan. God's people went right on through and came up on the other side. For twenty miles across from Adam, near Shiloh in the north, to the south at Gilgal, the Jordan River went dry during flood season.

Big Question

Do you want God to use you? Do you want him to do great things through you? We see Joshua – do you want to be a light for God in your city, like Joshua was for the nations? You want to do the impossible for God, then pursue Christ wholeheartedly.

1. CHRIST MUST BE PURSUED (3:1-3)

Joshua 3:1-3 | 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. ²At the end of three days the officers went through the camp ³and 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**.

I love that phrase, “As soon as you see... follow!” God opens our eyes, and we must follow him. We don’t have the Ark to follow. The Ark was a 4x2x2 box that carried some pretty special items including the 10 Commandment tablets. Now according to **Numbers 10:33-34**, **the Ark and the Pillar of Fire would travel together** and direct God’s people where to go. This was the tangible presence of God.

What Does the Ark Signify?

We read about the ark of the covenant in **Hebrews 9:3-4**, “Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, 4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.”

That ark was made with **wood**, which speaks of the humanity of Christ. The ark was covered in **gold** which speaks to the deity of Christ. In this chest were three things. First of all, the **tables of the ten commandments** were placed in this chest. Secondly, **Aaron's rod** which budded. Aaron was the priest of the Lord, he had a staff or a rod that he used to guide the people with. Aaron's rod was in there, but this dried stick miraculously started to bud and to blossom. They put that in the ark of the covenant. Also in the ark of the covenant was a **pot with some manna** in it. They picked up that manna that God had been feeding his people miraculously with and they put it in the pot.

These three things were in that treasure chest of blessing and they all tell us something about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Ten Commandments on tablets of stone point to the **righteousness** of Christ. Christ is our righteousness. Then we see that out of that dead, dry stick, Aaron’s rod came life and it speaks of Christ, our **resurrection**.

Then also the golden pot of manna, and it was with that manna that God sustained and fed and empowered his people, Christ, our supply, Christ, our ultimate **resource** of all blessing and sustenance is pictured there, Christ, the righteousness of God, Christ, the resurrection of God, Christ the resources of all of these are in that treasure chest of blessing.

Look to the Ark, and follow. The Lord says: “Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa 45:22). Have you looked to Christ for salvation? Sinner, come to Christ. He’s gentle and lowly and humble of heart. He says, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Come and be saved!

And you Christian, come again and again and again. We are saved by faith and we are sanctified by faith. You must surrender if you would come, but you must also surrender daily if you would follow Christ.

The Tangible, Visible Presence of God

The Ark of the covenant and especially the glory cloud was the tangible, visible representation of God’s presence. God’s people then and now are to follow him wherever he leads. Wherever he leads I’ll go. I will follow Jesus. Now, what does that mean to me? It means that Jesus Christ must be followed, Christ must be pursued unconditionally.

When the disciples followed Jesus, they dropped their nets, left all and followed him. **When I first came to know Christ**, I said, “LORD, whatever you want, I’ll do it.” I surrendered to be a preacher of the Gospel. I didn’t know what that meant. I didn’t know that meant learning Spanish or moving to another country. I didn’t know all the ups and downs of ministry. I just said, Yes! I have never regretted it. It has been the highest honor of my life. I didn’t know what was ahead, but I knew I wanted to follow Jesus wherever he leads.

Follow the Lord. Don’t worry about what that entails. He’ll lead you and guide you. It may be a place of comfort, it may be a place of pain, it may be a place of joy or sorrow, it may be a place of ease or difficulty. Whatever you are doing, be willing to leave all and go after the Lord.

God knows all. He is the “God of all grace” (1 Pet 5:10). Are you willing to follow a God who knows everything about the future, about you, and loves you in an unrelenting way? Are you pursuing Christ? Are you trusting him? **Pursue** him!

2. CHRIST MUST BE PERCEIVED (3:4)

See Christ in his holiness! There needed to be distance. Only the priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year where the ark was. This ark is representative of the presence of Christ.

Joshua 3:4 | 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.”

The fact that the ark would be readily visible did not mean the people could get close to it. They were called to look at it and follow it while staying a half a mile away from it! Why? The reason for the distance from the ark is in order that the people can tell where to go and can witness the cutting off of the Jordan, something they could not do if everyone was closely following the priests and the ark. But this way all could see Yahweh’s great deed and all could know the path to take.² Not to mention there is the incredible holiness of God on display.

One commentator writes, “There are two aspects of God’s nature on display—his close, comforting presence—and his awesome, fearsome glory. Both kept in a healthy balance in the Bible, but the latter is in danger of being forgotten in some churches today.”³

This is the presence of God in his glorious holiness. Everyone needs to see it on display. That’s why there needed to be a distance. This was not something that could be manufactured. This is the manifest presence of God.

Two million people needed to see the Ark at all times. They needed to see what in essence was the tangible presence of God. So they had to stay away two thousand cubits

² Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 33.

³ David M. Howard, Jr. *The New American Commentary, Vol 5: Joshua* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 122.

on each side, about one-half mile. Nothing could crowd in on God's presence to block it out.

Notice what God says. He says, "Stay back from the ark about half a mile. Why? It is very, very important that you don't crowd around it because if you do some people won't be able to see it. You need a clear view of the ark. The point is not distance, but perception. They need to be able to see the ark. **If you lose sight of the ark, you are lost.** You need to move when God moves and pause when God pauses. Paul said it this way, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (**Gal 5:25**).

Now, what he's saying is that you must keep your eyes upon that ark, you're going through uncharted territory, ways you've never been and therefore you must be able to see the ark in order to follow the ark. Christ must be perceived, you must be able to visualize him, you must be able to conceptualize him, you must be able to see who he is, what he is, he's doing, where's he going and what he is doing. Let me give you a good New Testament verse.

Hebrews 12:2 tell us that as Christians we are to be "looking unto Jesus who is the author and the finisher of our faith, look unto Jesus." Not looking at Jesus, but looking UNTO Jesus. You can't just know about him, you must trust him. I'm holding him up before you. The devil looks at him and trembles. But we must look UNTO him and trust.

Martin Luther, when he translated Hebrews 12:2, translated it this way, "off looking unto Jesus." Now, it doesn't mean you're off somewhere looking unto Jesus, but it means you're looking off from everything else unto Jesus.

3. CHRIST MUST BE PRESENT (3:5-17)

CHRIST IS PRESENT IN CONSECRATION

Joshua 3:5 | Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

Now, what does that word "consecrate" mean? It means to separate yourself, set yourself aside apart for a particular person or special purpose. The decision they are making is life changing, life dominating. They need to prepare their hearts and minds and not make the mistake of the previous generation.

Here is God's challenge to you today. Listen to it. God brought his people to the threshold of an impossible situation, which was an opportunity. This was a reconsecration of the Red Sea redemption. This is the second generation. They have to prefer Christ for themselves. They can't just ride in on the previous generation's coattails (most of which are buried in the desert anyway). God brings his people to the place of difficulty, and Joshua makes it clear and plain, no equivocation, no fine print in the contract.

Application: Don't just live your life by your feelings! Follow God. Prepare your heart with the Word and prayer. Sanctify the Lord in your heart.

CHRIST IS PRESENT IN EXALTATION

This is interesting. The Scripture says God exalts Joshua.

Joshua 3:6-8 | 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. ⁷The 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. ⁸And 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.’”

It’s not exaltation, as in **worship**. This is exaltation as in **usefulness**. “God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble” (Jas 5:5). “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will exalt you” (Jas 4:10).

Joshua must lead them through the flood of the Jordan River. Following God entails leadership. There needs to be tender courage. We need to have courageous love for those around us. We need to point the way. Joshua pointed to the ark, the symbol of God’s presence.

Leaders do not allow **pride** and **panic** to control them. Leaders are led by God’s presence and his Word which produces **humility** and **trust**.

God exalts Joshua. Joshua can’t change anything. All he has is the favor and grace and **empowerment** of God. But God must show up for anything to happen. Every Christian today has that empowerment by the Holy Spirit for service.

You want to be used of God: be unentitled. Pick up your cross. Put on the slave’s towel. That’s leadership. Lead the way to the presence of Christ. Walk with God in spirit and in truth. Worship him at all times. Walk with Christ and he will exalt you for service.

CHRIST IS PRESENT IN ACTION

Joshua doesn’t just talk about the Lord. The Lord is manifested through his ministry. A great miracle takes place. Here we see that faith always is empowered, faith works. Faith without action is dead. When Christ is present, great faith is exercised.

Joshua 3:9-13 | And Joshua said to the people of Israel, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.” ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. ¹²Now therefore take **twelve men** from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. ¹³And **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.**”

There are two scriptural **allusions** here that are **pictures of conversion**. The first allusion has to do with the twelve spies. They explore the land of Canaan in Numbers 13-14 and ten of them give up because of “giants in the land”. Joshua begins the do-over, “Choose twelve men” (3:12). This time no one is afraid. You will recall when 12 spies explored the promised land and **10 of them** ended up refusing to trust God. Here in Joshua

3, we have a new test of the same kind for this second generation. They must have heard the story of this great failure that led to forty years in the wilderness. They need to choose twelve men to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land.

The second allusion is the **Red Sea** crossing from Exodus 14. Again, this points to salvation. The Red Sea crossing is the most famous picture of salvation in the Old Testament and is alluded to most throughout the Bible.

Watch what happens. There is a manifestation when God moves in by faith.

Joshua 3:13 | 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.”

This would unmistakably bring in their mind the Red Sea crossing. This second generation needed to experience the “salvation of the Lord” as well. Now watch these priests! They have feet of faith! When they stepped onto the water, the waters parted. But it wasn’t until they took that step of faith.

God has you here this morning, and he’s asking you to take a step of faith. That first step is conversion. You need to be converted.

Another step of every believer is consecration and surrender. We are sometimes so selfish, we don’t want to give up our rights. We don’t want to give up control. Surrender to Christ today Christian. It’s a daily surrender. Walk in the Spirit. Surrender to Christ.

CHRIST IS PRESENT IN MANIFESTATION

At the end of the day, nothing happens until God shows up. This is true for all things in life. Once God’s presence (symbolized by the ark) is carried into the water, there is a 20 mile gap in the River – from the city of Adam (parallel with Zarethan and Shiloh) all the way to the Dead Sea.

Joshua 3:14-17 | 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, ¹⁵and 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),
¹⁶the 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. ¹⁷Now 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.

There was a twenty-mile wide gap in the Jordan River. The water was standing “in one heap” (3:13). That’s impossible right? “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Lk 18:27).

There were ten miles of dry crossing ground on either side of the ark. Wow! That's what happens when God shows up!

Now I want you to think of one impossible thing that God wants you to do. For some of you who don't know Christ, that means you trusting Christ today. Don't put it off.

For anyone who is in Christ, he's got you moving onto higher ground. You can't do this alone.

For some of you that means opening up to your forever family in the congregation.

For others, it means God has a calling on your life, and you don't feel at all worthy, but you need to surrender.

Some of you are here and you are Christians, but you haven't publicly confessed your faith in Christ. God's been talking to you about it.

But there are others here who God wants you to do a big thing. An impossible thing. I don't know what it is. It may seem small to others, but it is big to you. You need to trust God for it. Stop living in fear. Walk in faith!

Conclusion

What are you praying for? Nothing will happen until God shows up. Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

Now let me celebrate Christ here today. The Ark, representing Christ, went through that Jordan River. Jordan has the meaning of Judgment.

Christ your Ark of the Covenant went through that Judgment River for you. He was completely soaked in the justice for your sin. He was punished for sinners. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21).

We want justice in this world. We're praying for it. But we are not going to get perfect justice here on earth. Perfect justice even on earth only begins to be seen as people get their hearts right with Christ. Jesus is the answer!

It's easy for people to hate each other, but Christ calls us to take up our Cross. Of all people, we should have compassion on the oppressed and afflicted, because it is mainly the oppressed and afflicted that he calls. Not many wise. Not many mighty. God's chosen the weak and foolish things of this world to confound the mighty so that no human being would glory in His presence. Look to Christ!

How about you? Have you been through Judgment River with Christ? Can you say, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live" (Gal 2:20)?

Can you say, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain" (Phil 1:21)?

Can you say, "I count all things as dung, because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8)?

Maybe you are here today, and you see the impossible in front of you. You are buried in the flood. God says, walk by faith through the flood. I'll be with you in the fire and the flood. You are not alone! You are not alone!