

# How To Keep Walking By Faith

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, September 4th 2022

Today is my last sermon in Joshua chapter 3, and I am only going to read verses 14-17.

## I. Introduction - review (vv. 1-17)

Two weeks ago we looked at the nature of faith in this chapter - what constitutes genuine faith and what constitutes counterfeit faith. Last week we looked at ten factors that undergirded their faith-driven desire to conquer the land of Canaan for the Lord. I likened those to ten doses of fertilizer in which a culture of faith grows. Today's sermon will build on last week's. We are going to take a look at what it means to walk by faith. I've summarized the passage in seven words.

But before we look at those words, I want to deal with the controversy of what this miracle actually was. I think it was far more spectacular than what your typical *modern* commentary makes it out to be.

## II. The spectacular nature of this miracle

There are two theories of what happened here. Theory one says that God blocked the river 18 miles north at the city of Adam with a natural forming dam. On this theory the people would not have been able to see the blockage. The way the New King James translates it, it certainly favors that theory. And there is actually some basis for this theory. The text actually *can* be translated the way the New King James does. It's not as literal, but it can be translated that way. So it is a legitimate theory. Second, the river is much narrower near Adam and has been blocked about six times in past history as landslides produced a temporary dam. Admittedly, those blockages did not occur during the flood season, and probably could not have been sustained for an entire day during flood season. There is likely way too much water pressure. But it is interesting there have been at least six documented landslides in the past 1500 years that have dammed up the river for anywhere from two hours to two days. That's pretty significant. So that is theory number one.

The second theory (and this is the one that I hold to) says that the waters heaped up higher and higher in the air immediately to the right of Israel as they crossed the river. A more literal translation of the Hebrew word *echad* in verse 16 supports the second theory. Those who hold to this second theory also point out that crediting all of this to a naturally formed dam at Adam contradicts up to eight exegetical points. They also successfully show that it really doesn't work scientifically, but they mainly focus on eight exegetical clues. Because I see no way of getting around at least five of those eight exegetical clues, I firmly agree with this second theory. Let me at least give a brief summary of each of these eight reasons.

First, there are indicators that this was a miracle, not simply a seismic anomaly 18 miles north. For example, the word for “wonders” in verse 5 is a synonym for miracles. And some of the other eight points also indicate that this had to have been a supernatural miracle.

Second, the fact that the plural form for wonders is used, indicates that there has to have been at least two miracles that took place here. Any time the first theory tries to get more than one miracle into the account, it completely undermines the *need* for the theory, and we will look at that in a bit. But to summarize, one of the two miracles would be that even the ground dried up in verse 17. It wasn’t muddy. It was instantly dry ground. So that is definitely a miracle. But what is the second miracle? Theory number one is hard pressed to come up with a second miracle. And most who hold to this theory assume that there was mud.

Third, both verse 13 and verses 15-16 indicate that the instant the priests stepped into the water, the water coming down toward them stood still. It didn’t drain; it stood still. There is a big difference between standing still and draining. But if it had stood still from a natural seismic shift of dirt 18 miles north, there wouldn’t have been an instantaneous stopping of the river the moment their feet dipped into the water since it would take a long time for the waters of Adam to reach the place of Jericho, and the lay of the geography would necessitate that the waters gradually slowed down, not instantaneously stopped. And the text is quite clear that something instantaneously *stopped* the water from flowing the *moment* their feet touched it.

Fourth, chapter 4, verse 18 is quite clear that the *instant* the priests stepped *out* of the river bed, the water began to flow *as before* - something impossible to explain in terms of the scientific principles of hydraulics if theory one is correct. And the whole point of theory one is to explain this miracle in terms of natural causes. It’s my opinion that you can’t do it and be consistent with the text.

The fifth clue is that the first part of verse 16 doesn’t say that the waters stood still upstream; it says that the waters which came from upstread stood still. There’s a big difference. If the waters flowing from upstream stood still, it is most natural to think that they stood still right where they were at. Now, granted, if the second clause is exegetical of the first, and if the New King James translation is correct, then this objection could be explained away as the waters from *above* Adam stood still. But the literal Hebrew indicates that it is the waters that had already come down from upstream stood still.

Sixth, those waters that came from upstream started rising in a heap. That doesn’t sound like a natural dam. Natural dams simply block water. They don’t make waters stand up in a heap. Rather, it sounds like water is piling up in the air where they could see it. In other words, God is forming a supernatural invisible dam right where they are. And those who hold to the other theory ask, “Well, if *that’s* true, then why mention Adam, which is 18 miles north?” And that’s the next two points. It totally fits our theory.

The seventh point deals with translation. There are words left out of verse 16 in the New King James translation. Literally it goes like this: “that the waters which had come down

from upstream stood still and were rising up (kamu - קָמוּ) in a heap (nade נָדָה), backing up (echad אֶחָד) a great deal (maode מְאֹד) as far back as (ercheq הֶרְחֵק) to<sup>1</sup> the city of Adam (beadam בְּאָדָם)...” The idea is that a supernatural dam stopped the waters that had come down to them and those waters (not other waters, but the waters that had come down to them) stood up in a rising heap and since they couldn’t go forward, started backing up and forming a temporary lake that extended all the way back to Adam, where the narrow gorges wouldn’t let the water back up any further. And I’ve given someone’s diagram of an estimate of how much water would have accumulated during that day and how tall the wall was. There is no way of knowing for sure because we don’t know how much water was flowing, but the guestimates range from a wall of water 100 feet tall to 200 feet tall. I think one of the most reasonable estimates of how high the wall of water finally grew to be would be 120 high at the end of the day. But it could have been much more.

Well, that literal translation fits the geography perfectly since there is a bowl depression that would accomodate this lake from the place where they crossed all the way up to the city of Adam where the narrow inlet would form the mouth of the lake.

This translation is also verified in Psalm 78:13 where the exact same language of water heaping up is used of the Red Sea crossing. Psalm 78:13 says, “He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap.” That speaks of walls of water heaped up on either side of them. Well, here it is a wall of water heaped up on one side.

This literal interpretation is also confirmed in Psalm 114:3 where it says that the Jordan was turned back or held back. The King James says, “fled back.” Any of those is an appropriate translation. There is a movement of waters backward as they push against this dam. They have no where to go but backwards and outwards. Again, it is like God was putting an invisible barrier to the water where it couldn’t go forward and instead was backing up a great deal as far as the city of Adam.

Eighth, verse 16 says that only the waters that were on their left (or on the south side of them flowing toward the Dead Sea) were cut off or disappeared. That contrast (and there is a contrast) implies that the waters to their right did not disappear and were not cut off. The Hebrew indicates that the waters to their right stopped, but the waters to their left disappeared; they moved away; they did not stop. The distinction between the waters on their left (going south) and the waters on their right (flowing from the north) argues strongly that there wasn’t dry land all the way up to Adam. On theory one there would be have been no distinction between left and right. Both sides would have been cut off.

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<sup>1</sup> While אֶחָד can have a number of translations, including “at,” it can mean “to.” Clines says, “אֶחָד, to, with, e.g. אֶחָד־בְּמִשְׁפַּחַת מֹשֶׁה הָרַק did he only speak with Moses? Nm 12:2, אֶחָד־בְּפָנַי אֶל־פָּנָי I will speak with him face to face Nm 12:8, also Ho 1:2; Zc 1:9; Ps 46:7.” David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011), 86. It can also mean “from,” which would result in a similar meaning. It can also mean “against,” in which case the waters would be pushing against the narrow inlet near Adam. But the likely meaning is “to” or “from.”

Again, every word and every phrase of these verses needs to be accounted for, and this second theory says that these eight grammatical points are completely ignored or brushed over by the earthquake-landslide-dam theory.

In one sense it doesn't matter which theory is correct because God would have to have done some amazing things either way. If he stopped the river 18 miles north with a landslide, He still would have had to have dried up the river and then later would have had to have burst the upstream dam with enough time lapse so that the torrent of water would arrive the moment the priests left the river. Obviously He could do that, but Henry Morris (who has a degree in water hydraulics) and many others feel that it would lead to too many scientific and exegetical problems. Let me read from two other authors who hold to theory two. Todd Fink summarizes the scientific evidence of how much water would have accumulated during that day. He says,

The crossing of the Jordan was a much bigger miracle than we think as the river was at flood stage, overflowing its banks. As mentioned, the body of water that would have accumulated would have been 20 miles (32 km.) long, 2 miles (3.2 km.) wide, and around 120 ft. (37 m.) high. This was a massive body and wall of water the 3 million or more Israelites would have witnessed as they walked alongside it for about 2 miles (3.2 km.).<sup>2</sup>

So he guesstimates the wall of water to be about 120 feet high. Hopefully that gives a vivid picture in your mind of how spectacular this miracle really was. Modern commentaries try to explain everything scientifically, and in the process they explain away miracles. But this was a miracle of huge proportions.

Donald Campbell of the Bible Knowledge Commentary agrees. He discounts the dam theory saying that the handful of previous stoppages that have occurred in history did not occur during the flood stage of the river and could not have occurred during that time. And then he gives his own six exegetical points saying,

Many supernatural elements were brought together: (1) The event came to pass as predicted (3:13, 15). (2) The timing was exact (v. 15). (3) The event took place when the river was at flood stage (v. 15). (4) The wall of water was held in place for many hours, possibly an entire day (v. 16). (5) The soft, wet river bottom became dry at once (v. 17). (6) The water returned immediately as soon as the people had crossed over and the priests came up out of the river (4:18). Centuries later the Prophets Elijah and Elisha crossed the same river on dry ground to the east (2 Kings 2:8). Soon thereafter Elisha crossed back over the river on dry ground. If a natural phenomenon is necessary to explain the Israelites' crossing under Joshua, then one would have to conclude that two earthquakes occurred in quick sequence for Elijah and Elisha, which seems a bit presumptuous.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.holylandsite.com/copy-of-jordan-river-overview>

<sup>3</sup> The whole quote is: "How could this sensational event occur? Many insist that this was no miracle since the event can be explained as a natural phenomenon. They point out that on

The point is that this would have been a awe-inspiring miracle as the priests carrying the ark stood right in the middle of where the river had been, and stood next to the wall of water, and 2000 cubits south (which would be about 1000 yards south), the rest of the nation marched across the river in plain sight of this threatening body of water. Most pictures get it all wrong. They have the people too close to the ark and the wall of water too small. All the mud was dry underfoot and a nation of men, women, and children, animals, carts, and heavy equipment crossed. Mrs Krutz asked if the people of Jericho would have seen this. The answer is, yes. While there is debate on the exact location of Jericho, we do have some inspired information that is helpful. According to 2 Kings 2, the Jordan river was in plain view of Jericho,<sup>4</sup> whose citizens would have witnessed this with a growing sense of horror. God was indeed glorified in this amazing miracle.

### III. What it means to “walk by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7)

Well, with that as a background, I want to finish off the last point of last week’s sermon. We looked in the first nine points at the fertilizer of faith. Today I want to look at the specifics of what it means to walk by faith. We are commanded to do so. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Romans 4:12 calls us to “walk in the steps of the faith which

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December 8,1267 an earthquake caused the high banks of the Jordan to collapse near Tell ed-Damiyeh, damming the river for about 10 hours. On July 11,1927 another earthquake near the same location blocked the river for 21 hours. Of course these stoppages did not occur during flood season. Admittedly God could have employed natural causes such as an earthquake and a landslide and the timing would have still made it a miraculous intervention. But does the biblical text allow for such an interpretation of this event? Considering all the factors involved it seems best to view this occurrence as a special act of God brought about in a way unknown to man. Many supernatural elements were brought together: (1) The event came to pass as predicted (3:13, 15). (2) The timing was exact (v. 15). (3) The event took place when the river was at flood stage (v. 15). (4) The wall of water was held in place for many hours, possibly an entire day (v. 16). (5) The soft, wet river bottom became dry at once (v. 17). (6) The water returned immediately as soon as the people had crossed over and the priests came up out of the river (4:18). Centuries later the Prophets Elijah and Elisha crossed the same river on dry ground to the east (2 Kings 2:8). Soon thereafter Elisha crossed back over the river on dry ground. If a natural phenomenon is necessary to explain the Israelites’ crossing under Joshua, then one would have to conclude that two earthquakes occurred in quick sequence for Elijah and Elisha, which seems a bit presumptuous. By this great miracle, the crossing of the Jordan River at flood stage by a nation of about 2 million people, God was glorified, Joshua was exalted, Israel was encouraged, and the Canaanites were terrorized.” Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 335.

<sup>4</sup> Though there is debate on the location of Jericho, 2 Kings 2 indicates that Elijah and Elisha’s crossing was visible to the 50 prophets in Jericho (implication of vv. 7,15,18).

our father Abraham had...” We are called to metaphorically *walk* by faith. And I think we can learn how to do that by seeing how these Israelites very *literally* walked by faith. I’ve summarized it with seven words.

### A. Leave. It means leaving your comfort zone (v. 14a)

The first word is “leave.” Verse 14a says, “So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan...” Stepping out in faith means leaving your comfort zone. Notice that they left with a determination to cross over the Jordan. They had been used to the wilderness for forty years. By this time they had no enemies on the east side of the river. In contrast, there were numerous nations on the West side that were very hostile. So leaving their camp was leaving their comfort zone and crossing the Jordan was definitely going into the danger zone. Leaving their previous life was part of stepping out in faith.

The first time we leave anything by faith is when we first become Christians. We have to leave the world and cleave to God. And sometimes that first leaving can be really difficult. In eastern cultures where the community is valued much more than the individual, for an individual to leave Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Islam, or communism, or animism is treated as a kind of betrayal. It is super hard for people to leave. It means going against peer pressure, family pressure, emotional ties, and bearing a bit of shame. In the book of Hebrews there were Christians who had a hard time leaving their synagogues for the same reason. They didn’t want to face persecution and shame. But Hebrews 13:12 says that Jesus left Judaism and verse 13 says, “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” So conversion is one kind of leaving.

But there are many times in the Christian life when we are called to leave something before we can embrace God’s call in faith. When God calls us to rebuke a brother or sister, it involves leaving the comfort of being liked by that person in order to do what Christ has called us to do.

George Muller said that God prompted him to tell people about his former sinful lifestyle in order to give them hope that they could find victory over the sins that enslaved them. But the very thought of telling everyone about his wretched past made him realize that he would lose his reputation with the clergy, politicians, and many others who he knew would judge him. They wouldn’t think that was cool. They would think he was a very bad role model. But he left his reputation behind. He said,

I have made myself, therefore, a fool, and degraded myself in the eyes of the inhabitants of Bristol, that you, my dear unconverted fellow-sinners, who may read this, may with God’s blessing be made wise. The love of Christ has constrained me to speak about my former lies, thefts, fraud, etc., that you might be benefited.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George Müller, *Autobiography of George Müller: A Million and a Half in Answer to Prayer* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1914), viii.

And they were. His ministry to these sin-enslaved wretches was phenomenal once he left his reputation behind.

But there are other things God sometimes calls us to leave when we walk by faith. God has called people to leave very comfortable jobs behind in order to enter the ministry. He has called others to leave security behind in order to join a community of believers. For one person it was admitting to having a one-time fling of adultery and risk losing his wife and everything that he held dear. He agonized over this for a long time, but eventually left his fears behind and told the Lord he would do what God was asking him to do. And in his case, it turned out beautifully well. But whether it does or not, the next point needs to be held onto tightly or the leaving can easily be unsuccessful. Leaving by itself is not enough.

### **B. Follow. It means following Jesus wherever He leads us (v. 14b)**

The second word is “follow.” It means following Jesus wherever He leads us. Verse 14 shows what led the way: “with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant *before* the people...” Last week we saw that the ark of the covenant was a symbolic representation of Jesus, and God’s glory cloud rested on top of that ark - at least when it was in the tabernacle. We aren’t told if the Glory Cloud was visible here. Most think not. But it is clear that to follow where the ark went was symbolic of following Jesus wherever He led them. He was now the Lord of their lives.

In his book, *Abandoned to Christ*, L.E. Maxwell says, “Consecration is not to some service, but to Christ - utter abandonment to Christ.”<sup>6</sup> And that is not just at the beginning of your Christian walk. It can be at any time. For years I had my heart set on planting churches in Canada. And I had three well-financed options to do so - one of which had an almost unlimited spending account. It seemed like my dreams were coming true. But God suddenly called me to come to Omaha. And I was nervous about that. The salary was a quarter of what I would have had in Canada. The spending account was zero compared to an unlimited spending account up there - at least with the OPC. So I knew it would be hard in Omaha for at least a few years. And enormous pressure was being put on me by two denominational church planting boards and by my family and friends up there. But I left my dreams behind when I came to Omaha because I believed God had called me to this place. And apart from God’s call, there continued to be many reasons to leave. In the first ten years I received many fantastic ministry offers (or what I thought of as temptations to escape my call), and I had former professors and colleagues tell me that I was being foolish to turn down those offers - these were the perfect jobs where all I would have to do was teach in a mega church with no other responsibilities (which is actually not a good thing for a pastor). But I was abandoned to Christ and His call, and that was all that mattered.

So the first point shows leaving something behind. If you have an upward call from Jesus, you are going to be leaving something to answer that call. You might be leaving self-worth, riches, acclaim, position, prestige, or any number of things. But we don’t leave things for the sake of leaving things. That’s pagan asceticism. We leave things *in order to pursue Christ*

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<sup>6</sup> L.E. Maxwell, *Abandoned to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 15.

*with all our heart.* We are utterly abandoned to Christ. Some of these Israelites would actually lose their lives in the next few months. Some would experience wounds and other forms of loss and suffering. But they were committed to following Christ no matter what. Shortly after the American War for Independence, one church group had the following statement of consecration. I think it is legalistic for a *church* to require it, but this is a great consecration for us to voluntarily make to Jesus. It says,

I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt; rank me with whom Thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee, exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.<sup>7</sup>

If the whole Christian church was consecrated to Jesus like that, the church would be an unstoppable force. In fact, if the church was simply as committed to the cause as the communists of the past were consecrated to the spread of communism, we would accomplish incredible things - because unlike the communists, we have the truth, we have His power, we have an eschatology of victory, and we have His presence promised with us always. God calls all of us to leave certain things and to follow Him without reservation. Our life is not our own. We belong to Christ lock, stock, and barrel, and should act like it.

A Communist told a missionary with China Inland Missions, “We Communists, just like you Christians, have something worth dying for.” Those words so shocked the missionary that he later fell to his knees and confessed his luke-warmness, crying out to God, “O God, what have I worth dying for?” These Israelites were following the ark of the covenant across the Jordan knowing full well that some of them might die in the cause of exalting God in the earth. Brothers and sisters, are you willing to lay down your life for Christ? It involves leaving perfectly good things behind and following Christ with all your heart.

### **C. Step. It means obeying God’s direct commands before you see how it will be possible (v. 15a)**

The third word is step. Walking by faith means obeying God’s direct commands before you see how it will be possible to do so. The first part of verse 15 says, “and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water...” They actually got their feet wet. They got them into the water. And then he gives a parenthetical statement to show how audacious this was. But before we get to that parenthetical statement, just notice that they obeyed God’s command without question. They stepped into the water even though the water had not yet parted. And of course, it then instantly parted.

This was an action of faith. And by the way, every time you take an action of faith, it strengthens your faith to believe God for more. William Booth said,

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<sup>7</sup> Maxwell, *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again – until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other.<sup>8</sup>

That’s what it means to walk by faith. And when we don’t keep walking by faith, it is possible for faith to dry up. And the reason for that is that God is the giver of faith, and He has ordained for faith to grow only when faith is exercised. The expression is that we grow from faith to faith.

Now, obviously there are over ten different interpretations of that phrase, but recently Charles Quarles<sup>9</sup> did an exhaustive analysis of every interpretation given of the phrase “from faith to faith” in Romans 1:17 over the past 1500 years, compared it to every other occurrence of “from A to A” in Greek literature, and has shown pretty conclusively that it cannot ever refer to emphasis (as some have tried to say) and must refer to the *growth* of a person’s faith over time (as Calvin, Sanday and Headlam, Lagrange, and others have held). To me, this interpretation makes the most sense of Paul’s quotation of Habakkuk 2:4. Let me read Romans 1:16-17. It starts with how a person gets saved:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Then in verse 17 he demonstrates that wherever there is genuine faith it keeps exercising faith and keeps growing in faith:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

The phrase, “shall live by faith” is *future* tense. This means that every already-justified person is called to *keep* living by the power of God *in his future* and to *keep* growing in faith and to *keep* receiving God’s righteousness for his life for the rest of his life. And thus Habakkuk’s call for the just to *live* by faith; not just to get *saved* by faith, but to *live* by faith.

But back to my main point, the only way we can grow from faith to faith (Romans 1:17), and grow from strength to strength (Psalm 84:7), and grow from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18) is to go beyond believing that God is *able* to do what He says, but to *appropriate* what God has for us. We must *step into* His provision, and the more times we do that, the more our faith grows.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *Christianity Today*, October 5, 1992, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Charles L. Quarles, ‘From Faith to Faith: A Fresh Examination of the Prepositional Series in Romans 1.17’, *NovT* 45 (2003) 2–5. For an interesting discussion of this, see Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 75–76.

Conversely Jeremiah 9:3 says that when you step into evil it becomes easier to step into the next evil and even easier to step into the next evil, and that verse says that people will “proceed from evil to evil.” Evil can grow just as faith can grow. There is no neutrality. You are either moving forward or you are sliding backwards in your faith. So acting on God’s promises by faith even when we do not see the results is an important facet of *growing* in faith. You don’t get to where George Muller was at the end of his life without your own lifetime of living by faith.

#### **D. Ignore. It means ignoring the impossible and ignoring the evidences Satan throws against our senses to make us doubt (v. 15b)**

The next word is “ignore.” Walking by faith means ignoring the impossible and ignoring the evidences Satan throws against our senses to make us doubt. Verse 15 shows how insane it might have seemed for these 3 million Jews to cross the river at this time: “for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest.” He is letting us know that this was during the Spring run-off from the snow on the mountains when the Jordan had so much water that the land was flooded. It was easy for full-grown men to cross the Jordan when it was *not* flooding, but it was not possible for entire families to cross during a time of flood. So to their human sight it made no sense, but to faith it makes perfect sense to believe God. Faith ignores any evidence contrary to God’s Word. We know that God’s Word is the only infallible thing in life.

When everything went against Job in Job chapters 1-2, it may have seemed like God did not love him, was not present, and was not faithful to His promises. But Job ignored those evidences and not only trusted God and worshiped, he encouraged his wife to do so. And yes, Job also later on became an illustration of how easy it is to begin to doubt when the pressure is unrelenting. In Matthew 14, Peter started to walk on the water by faith, but when the evidences around him became alarming, his faith began to waver. But we don’t need to think about miracles to apply this principle:

When you pray blessings into the lives of people who have been cursing you, abusing you, and using you, it makes no sense if you only factor in the evidences presented to your sight. Our senses tell us that they deserve God’s wrath and justice. But when Christ commands us to bless them and do good to them, we say, “OK, Lord. I will trust you. May you bless this enemy of mine financially, emotionally, in position - but most of all, bless him with repentance and salvation.” We are ignoring the natural evidence of what we should do and we are clinging to the Scriptural evidence of what God has said we should do. God says that this is the way to prosper.

It takes faith for a businessman to implement the principles in the book, *The Habit of Going the Extra Mile*. But by faith we know that it does pay off.

When George Muller would pray for the salvation of an individual, he ignored the evidences of hard heartedness, being abandoned by God, etc and focused on God’s promises. This step of ignoring the evidence that Satan throws our way is important if we are to keep walking by faith. Using the analogy of a horse and buggy in a street full of cars, the horse has

blindness on the sides of the eyes to keep it from getting startled or distracted by sideshows and to keep the horse's eyes fixed on the goal.

### **E. Experience. It means learning to experience the reality of God's supernatural in your life at His sovereign pleasure (v. 16).**

The next word is "experience." Walking by faith means learning to experience the reality of God's supernatural in your life at His sovereign pleasure. The caveat (that it is at God's sovereign pleasure) is an important corrective to those who think they can command a miracle at whim. We aren't the Lord; God is. He is sovereign for when and where He gives miracles.

But at the same time, we must believe in the supernatural or we will never experience the supernatural. We must believe in miracles or we will never experience miracles. I don't like the loose translation that the New King James gives of verse 16, so I will read a literal translation again: "that the waters which had come down from upstream stood still and were rising up in a heap, backing up a great deal as far back as to<sup>10</sup> the city of Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. And the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off, and the people crossed over opposite Jericho."

I've already dealt with the nature of the miracle adequately. All I want to comment on right now is that the age of miracles is not past; it is now - the very age of Jesus that Joshua typifies. And one of my proof texts that it is now is Hebrews 6:5. Hebrews 6:5 refers to the miracles that church of that time had experienced as them having tasted of "the powers of the age to come," But what a lot of people don't realize is that verse uses the word μέλλω. It is literally, have tasted of "the powers of the age about to come." In AD 66 (when Hebrews was written) it was about to be fully inaugurated. The period of transition from AD 30-70 was almost finished and the end of the Old Covenant was imminent. Hebrews 8:13 says that when Jesus spoke of a New Covenant, He made the first obsolete. So legally it *was* made obsolete in AD 30. But then he concludes with an interesting statement: "Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." AD 70 really was a major demarcation point.

But back to Hebrews 6:5, if miracles are even more characteristic of our age than they were of the Old Covenant age, then we should expect an increase in miracles during *this* age. After all, Jesus indicated that casting out demons and doing miracles was a sign that the kingdom had come. It's not a sign of eternity. It's a sign that the kingdom has come.

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<sup>10</sup> While אֶל can have a number of translations, including "at," it can mean "to." Clines says, "אֶל, to, with, e.g. אֶל־בְּמִשְׁפַּחַת מֹשֶׁה דִּבֶּר did he only speak with Moses? Nm 12:2, אֶל־פָּה פִּה I will speak with him face to face Nm 12:8, also Ho 1:2; Zc 1:9; Ps 46:7." David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011), 86. It can also mean "from," which would result in a similar meaning. It can also mean "against," in which case the waters would be pushing against the narrow inlet near Adam. But the likely meaning is "to" or "from."

What kind of miracles and wonders? Well, let me give a short listing of some of the kinds of miraculous happenings that were prophesied to happen during the age of the kingdom. Scripture anticipates every nation being converted and actually living by the Bible. It predicts an end to war. That's a kind of miracle. Both Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 say that nations will eventually be past having wars. It says, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." But there will be physical miracles on a massive scale as well. Listen to Isaiah 11:6-9.

Is. 11:6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

That mentions several miracles. Somehow genetics will be improved to the point that lions and leopards won't eat meat, and vipers will no longer bite or inflict poison. Isaiah 65 says that eventually there will be no more miscarriages. Nor will they bring forth children for trouble because God's blessing will rest on them generation after generation. In fact, disease will decrease until it will eventually be rare that a person will die at the young age of one hundred, and it will be common for people to live upwards of a thousand years old. It wouldn't surprise me if we have 100,000 or more years of history ahead of us. The whole trajectory of history is moving toward the reversal of everything affected by the fall, with only death being the final enemy to be put under Christ's feet at His final coming. How many thousands of years some of those things will be in our future, I don't know, but the miraculous will keep growing. In our Revelation series we looked at God's plans to positively affect even the soil we live on.

The only point I want to make is that even though miracles are under God's sovereign administration, we live in the age where the powers of God displayed in miracles will become more and more common. We must believe in the supernatural. We must believe in miracles. The reason the West doesn't see as many healings and other miracles happening here as the Chinese, Indians, and Africans see is because the West is skeptical of miracles. And God refuses to bless skepticism. Without faith it is impossible to please Him.

I'm glad that this congregation believes in miracles. Last Sunday some of you were telling me of recent miracles God had done in your lives. Since the book of Joshua is a type of Jesus and the kingdom, this is a call for every member of the new Israel to believe that nothing is too hard for God.

#### **F. Stand. It means standing your ground when danger assails you (v. 17a)**

The next word is "stand." Walking by faith means standing your ground when danger assails you. Verse 17 begins with these words: "Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan..." To stand

firmly implies that there might be a reason to run as this wall of water keeps getting higher and higher, but they steadfastly resisted that urge and they stood their ground with the ark being placed between the people and the water. When parents get nervous, it is easy for the children to get nervous. When elders cave in to ungodly government mandates it is easy for the members to do so. Standing ground when danger threatens is often a test that God gives to our faith. Sometimes we fail, sometimes we succeed. But Ephesians 6:13 says, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” And he repeats that call to stand in verses 11, 13, and 14.

If you were in China and the government had shut down churches, would you have obeyed the civil government or would you have obeyed God’s admonition in Hebrews 10:25? - “not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching.” Those Hebrew Christians were also a persecuted minority. Christianity was made illegal by both Rome and Israel, and both Romans and Jews were hunting down Christians. It was a tough time in which to be obeying that mandate, but Luke (who wrote Hebrews) admonished them to stand strong.

Taking a stand when it is not safe to do so makes no sense to those who live by sight - or to those who don’t want to be cancelled by corporate America or by the social media. But taking a stand is walking by faith. And it strengthens our faith. Even how you deal with social media can reflect walking by faith or not walking by faith.

### **G. Bless. It means trusting God on behalf of others (v. 17b)**

The last word is “bless.” Faith does not just receive things from God’s throne for *ourselves*. James says that you ask amiss when you only ask to consume it on your own pleasures. God-given faith desires to receive so that the whole body can benefit together with us. Verse 17 concludes: “and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.” Those priests took their stand so that everyone could benefit. They experienced a miracle for the benefit of others.

And we too are called to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God *for the benefit of others*. Ephesians 4:29 says that even our conversations with each other should be for “edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” If you study 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4, you will see phrases that indicate that every spiritual gift was to be exercised in a way that benefited others.

And there are many ways we can test this. What is our attitude in prayer? Is it gimme, gimme, gimme so that I can have comfort and gladness, or is it a kingdom oriented prayer? When your car breaks down and you pray for the finances for a new car (which you probably should have been saving up for anyway - but let’s say it was a premature accident), your prayer can be a self-absorbed prayer and it can be a kingdom prayer. If you have devoted your car to the Lord and you are always willing to have God use your car when needed to bless others, you can pray for a new car when it breaks down and be praying it with a kingdom attitude.

Though God is incredibly generous in blessing us individually, most of the miracles God has sovereignly distributed into my life and into Kathy's life have been miracles needed to bless others. This was true when I ministered in India and other foreign countries and it has been true here. Since we didn't often serve fish to company, God hasn't multiplied the fishes for Kathy and me, but we have both experienced God multiplying the roast and potatoes and other foods as additional people showed up. We prayed in faith, "Lord, make this food that is enough for fifty last for more than one hundred," and Kathy can tell you stories of there not only being enough meat and potatoes for everyone, but enough for everyone to have seconds, and there still being so much left over that we and the international students living with us were able to eat leftovers for the next few days. It was asking for a miracle to bless others.

And there are many examples of miracles in our ordinary life that were given so that we could more effectively bless others. I mentioned George Muller a lot last week. When you read about the enormous number of miracles that God blessed him with, it is not surprising when you realize that his life was devoted to blessing others - whether that was in the orphanage, in church, in the community, or at conferences. Here's the point: *miracles are usually distributed on behalf of the kingdom*, and the more kingdom oriented you are, the more likely it will be that you will experience miracles.

Last week we focused mainly on the fertilizer out of which faith grows. But this passage shows the things that need to be present if we are to continue to walk by faith. We must leave our comfort zone. We must follow Jesus wherever He leads. We must step out in obedience to God's commands even if they seem impossible. We must ignore the naysayers and all the evidence that contradicts God's Word and really believe that the Bible is the only infallible thing in life. We must believe in the supernatural and learn to experience the supernatural. We must take a stand. And we must receive from the Lord so that we can better bless others. May it be so for each of us. Amen.