

**Joshua 3:7-17**  
**October 25, 2009**  
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## **Bold Steps**

<sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.

<sup>8</sup> Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: "When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river."

<sup>9</sup> Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.

<sup>10</sup> This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.

<sup>11</sup> See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.

<sup>12</sup> Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.

<sup>13</sup> And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD--the Lord of all the earth--set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

<sup>14</sup> So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them.

<sup>15</sup> Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge,

<sup>16</sup> the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

<sup>17</sup> The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

In the year 49 B.C., supposedly on January 10, Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in pursuit of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus. At that time, according to Suetonius, a general and a historian, Caesar uttered those famous words, "THE DIE IS CAST". Apparently, as Caesar approached the River Rubicon, Caesar was still undecided as to what to do, but seemed to be guided by some kind of supernatural vision to forge ahead. The phrase "Crossing the Rubicon" has survived the centuries and now refers to any person who has committed himself irrevocably to a risky course of action.

You and I always reach points of critical decisions. Those moments can have huge repercussions and effect on the rest of our lives. We come to a fork in the road like the poet Robert Frost who said, **“Two roads diverged in a wood, And I took the one less traveled by And that has made all the difference.”**

You can relate to this dilemma. For many of us, the greatest decisions we have made relates to our spiritual walk with God. You can now say that the choice of deciding to follow Jesus was a critical moment in your life. To a lesser degree, the choice you chose for a career has made all the difference. Perhaps your choice of how to respond to an illness has made all the difference. Sitting in a doctor’s office choosing to take radical steps of chemotherapy or simply allowing the disease to run its natural course is a HUGE decision for a person.

The Israelites faced just such a junction in chapter 3 of Joshua. What we are most familiar with about the life and leadership of Joshua is the battle of Jericho where the Israelites marched around the city and blew their trumpets until the city collapsed. Who could ever have had the faith to try and bring down a stronghold city like Jericho with trumpets, marching and shouts. Yet their faith prevailed and the city collapsed as the result of this faith. Weeks and months before they ever approached Jericho, they had to make those first bold steps into the Promised Land that had been promised to Abraham centuries earlier. Crossing the Jordan was for them, a step into an unknown land. The spies who had been sent into the land, described giants. The land beyond the Jordan was described as a dangerous place with plenty of enemies. But God had said, “I will go with you. There is nothing to fear.”

I want you to try and imagine something. Let’s say you spent your entire life dreaming of something. Your parents and grandparents dreamt of it before you and would tell you stories about it. From your earliest memories, you were told how wonderful it would be when this one thing finally came to pass.

Now also imagine that every person you have ever known is also dreaming of this same thing. It was not a personal dream, it was a NATIONAL dream. Everyone wanted it. All of your activities were supposed to be moving you in the direction of fulfilling that dream. It was the one goal which everyone was striving. Can you feel it? Can you imagine it? That is what we see in this passage this morning. Israel was at the end of their 40 years of exile and roaming in the desert of Sinai. Moses was dead and Joshua had become the new leader. God instructs Joshua to “be strong and courageous and take the land.” Also, God promises, “I will always be with you.” Imagine the anticipation. 40 years of waiting. A whole generation dies off and is replaced by two new generations.

I’ve never waited 40 years for anything! But this national dream of a new homeland has been the central focus for two generations and now the time has come. Now comes the command to cross the river.

**Consecrate yourself.**

First, the leaders go through the camp to get the people ready to go. They are told to follow the priests. There is a wonderful line in this passage that I have heard sermons and Bible studies reflecting on this single line. V. 4 “Since you have never traveled this way before.” This is a new time in the life of Israel. We can say that this is a new time in the life and ministry of Second Baptist with a new pastor. There are many times in your life when you can say, “I’ve never trod this ground before”.

I drove up to Camp Moses Merrill on Monday and when I got to Prague, I knew that I had never been beyond that point before. Grace and I had been to Prague a few weeks ago, but now I had entered unfamiliar territory as I drove north. Had I said, “I can’t go here because it is unfamiliar”, I would have turned around and gone home and missed out on my time at the camp.

When Grace and I went on Route 66, when I reach Chicago and turned on to I-55 coming south out of Chicago, I knew I had never been on that road before. For the next 4,000 miles, I traveled roads I hadn’t been on before. We can see it as a barrier or we can see it as a new opportunity. The Israelites knew that they could no longer depend on what they knew and what was familiar. They knew that they would have to depend upon the leading of their priests and their leader Joshua and look to God’s direction.

This is a new chapter, a new adventure, a new land. Part of their preparation was a spiritual one. God commands the people to “purify” themselves. They needed to get spiritually ready for what comes next. There are a couple of critical lessons here that remain true for us just as they were for the Israelites. Let’s take a look.

First, God will always lead us onto new ground. We might be content with staying the same way we are now, but God has something greater in store for us. We might hate change, but God is not content with us remaining entrenched in the past. He wants to move us from where we are to where he wants us. Sometimes it is a painful process. Like crossing the Jordan, it is risky and we could face some dangerous situations. Change requires that we face that pain with a willingness to become what God wants for us. It requires us letting go.

The **second lesson that** applies to us is that we need to go through some preparation for God to move us into a new territory. This involves us becoming purified or consecrated. I’m not saying PERFECTED, but I’m saying “consecrated”. God prepares us for the next step in our journey. It is disastrous if we try and run ahead of God. God gives us the vision, the stamina, the patience and the know-how to venture into new territory.

If we go there without him, we are heading into dangerous waters. Sometimes there are sins in our lives that will prevent us from effectively being used by God. Running ahead of God without repentance and preparation can mean carrying those sins into the role God has called us to do.

Joshua 3:5 says: “Consecrate (sanctify or purify) yourself, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you.” The same is true today. If God is continuously consecrating and purifying us, then he can work wonders in our lives and we can be used for his glory.

I think this is such an important step for each of us. Consecrate is not saying, “God, I want this and I want it now.” Consecrate or sanctify means to become set apart for God’s use and glory. It means giving ourselves over to his creativity and work. It means letting go of our own plan and conforming to his plan.

Remember Romans 12:1 “<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Paul’s words are in absolute sync with what God is requiring of the Israelites before they cross the Jordan. If this were to work, their hearts would have to be in tune with God’s heart. They would have to abandon their own agenda and plan to take on the heart and purpose of God.

If we are going to move in the direction of God’s great gift of our own Promised Land – whatever that might be, then before we can walk boldly forward, we have to submit and become in tune with God.

We do that as individuals, as church boards and as a congregation as a whole. Next we see the people begin to move. We assume that the sanctification or consecration process was completed because the next morning, Joshua goes to the priests and gives them their instructions. They move forward with the Ark of the Covenant and the water parts and they enter into new territory. With that adventure will come danger, enemy conflict, uncertainty and Jericho. Yet God has said that he will go with them, he will go ahead of them, and they will succeed. His promises are solid and true. He did not fail his people, even when they would later on fail him.

Conclusion...

There are some important lessons for us here. I hope you caught them. First, he loves us enough to plan for our future. God told them centuries later under the prophetic voice of Jeremiah, “For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you.” That was no isolated place in time. God always has a plan for his people and when we are faithful enough to listen and hear his voice, we will see his plan unfold.

We also learn that, like crossing the Jordan, his plan involves faith on our part. We move only when he goes ahead of us. We count on his mercy and safety as we go. Thirdly, we learn that we have to be ready for what he has by living **holy and consecrated lives**. That requires bending to his will and abandoning our own agenda. Sometimes God’s plan involves pain and hardship, but the end result is safety and rest. Finally, we move with faith toward what God has established as our **place of promise**. Can you see yourself in this progression? Are you hanging on so tightly to your agenda that you are unwilling to move with God toward his place of promise? You’d rather stay on the safe side of the river where there are no blessings. We learn from this text to let God lead. Walk in step with him. Take bold steps in the direction he has set for you.