

Christ in our Crossing | Joshua 3-4

God gives Abram a promise in Genesis 12 that He is going to make him into a nation and give him land

For 400 years they are enslaved in Egypt. God raises up Moses and delivers them out of slavery and reaffirms the promise that He's going to give them land. Out into the wilderness they go, they get right up to the edge of the land, but are forbidden to enter it because of sin. They wonder for another 40 years until that disobedient generation dies. Moses dies. Joshua is the new leader, and God says, it's time for me to give you the land. So here they are, almost 500 years later, on the brink of possessing God's promise of land.

The problem is that this territory is enemy occupied. We aren't talking empty fields, we are talking fortified, strong civilizations. God reaffirms His promise to Joshua that this Land He will give them, they need to be strong and courageous. Joshua sends out some spies, they come back, yes the land is good and its ours for the taking.

And we pick up in chapter 3

God's people prepare for crossing

3:1 Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. 2 At the end of three days the officers went through the camp 3 and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. 4 Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." 5 Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." 6 And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

So faith-filled Israel heads out led by Joshua and they get all the way to the Jordan. On the other side of the Jordan is the Promise Land. They are there. The whole nation. That's pretty impressive. It's hard enough to get my whole family, just my wife and three kids across town, and that's in a mini-van. We are talking the entire nation, men, women, children, babies, all their luggage. Traveling through the wilderness, now camped beside this river. They got a promise and an obstacle. The promise from God. God is going to give you the Land. They got an obstacle, big river, and enemies on the other side. They know nothing else.

What is exemplary here is that they are walking by faith, not by sight. they don't know how its all going to play out. But they are trusting in God and being obedience to His word.

They then prioritize the presence of God in their community. The priests carry the ark in front them, while the rest must keep a distance. The ark was the most significant object of worship in the OT. Something you didn't mess with. God's holiness and presence rested there. Inside was Aaron's staff, the ten commandments on the tablets. Gold overlayed, cherubim with wings that faced each other. Here the distance may have been about His holiness, but probably more so for the sake of being able to see and follow God where God would lead them. Stand back so you will know the way to go. How often do we try to run ahead of God. We don't let God lead. We rush in and pray later. Here they get it right, they stop, and put God out front.

After they prioritize the presence of God in their community, they then consecrate themselves, a fancy way of saying they made themselves suitable for God. This likely would have involved washing clothes, abstaining from certain pleasures, there was a whole list of things they needed to do to make themselves holy. It's how they were to deal with sin in their community. Consecrating involved cleansing but also dedication. They were

giving themselves to God's use. Here we are, do with us as you please. And finally it also involved anticipation, "for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." Another translation says "amazing things". God's going to do something amazing, get ready!

1. So what is our readiness for obedience. The Israelites obeyed immediately when God spoke. Delayed obedience is disobedience.
2. Are we trusting and walking by faith? How concerned are you with the future. Not that you shouldn't plan, but that it shouldn't be what you fixate on. Jesus says today has enough trouble of its own. Planning for the future can easily be an idolatrous disbelief in God's ability to care for you. Sometimes we refuse to obey because we don't see how its all going to shake out. God's not asking you to know what's coming down the tracks, He's asking for the next step of obedience. "God often reveals what's in His hand one finger at a time."
3. Are we consecrating and dedicating ourselves to God's purpose? Whose purpose are you living for?
4. Anticipating God to move in your life.

So what's the why behind the amazing things? Is there any deep purpose to it?

God's Purpose in the crossing

7 The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. 8 And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" 9 And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." 10 And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Two primary purposes we see that God has in this crossing. The first is that God wants to exalt His chosen leader Joshua. He speaks to Joshua, reaffirming His presence with Him, but more than that, God is concerned with how the people relate to and perceive Joshua. The people followed Moses, and they trusted that God was with Moses. But Moses is dead. Joshua's probably wondering how in the world can I fill Moses' shoes, and why would the people follow me, I've got no track record. God says, I'm about to give you a track record, and listen Joshua, it doesn't have to do with you, it has to do with me. It's my track record, and I am going to show that I am with you, so that they may "know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." God is choosing Joshua to be His chosen servant and means to lead His people into the promises of God.

So He gives Joshua some instructions, which then Joshua then gives to the priests and to the people. He tells the priests they are going to stand still in the water, then He tells the people, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God." Joshua is functioning as the channel by which the Word of God gets to the people. God doesn't go around Joshua's mouth and leadership, His Word goes through Him. Here's the pattern... God speaks to Joshua, Joshua speaks to the people. God's Word and Joshua linked, confirming Him as the Leader.

Then this shows us the second great purpose of this crossing...

v.10, "And Joshua said, Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the rest of the ites."

What's about to happen is not only going to exalt God's servant Joshua, its going to confirm that the living God is among you (His presence) and He will without fail drive out from before you your enemies.

There's going to be a demonstration of God's power so great going to blow your mind, that is going to convince you of God's presence and God's Power and God's faithfulness to fulfill His Promise. His presence, His power, His promise.

God is strategic and incredibly focused on what He desires to accomplish in how He brings them into the Promise Land. He wants to display His Hand in such a way that Joshua His servant is exalted and His people trust and gain confidence that God is with them and that God is powerful and faithful to continue driving out the enemies. So this is a huge moment for the people of God. Here they are sitting homeless as wanderers on the side of this raging river, and they know they are about to go into enemy occupied territory. God is so gracious to consider their fears and anxieties, He doesn't them doubting His servant, nor His power or His presence or His faithfulness to them. There's going to be some trials up ahead, and they are going to need something to look back on.

God desires for His people to know His presence, power, and trust in His promises. And we need this right, we are easily frightened, easily doubt. We need Him to show up to remind us. God graciously shows up to us in our weakness and fears to confirm Himself to us. Are you needing to know God is with you this morning? Cry out to Him, He will make Himself known to you.

So how is God going to do it...

God's plan for the crossing

11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. 12 Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. 13 And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."

Up to this point they have no idea what's going to happen. Just here by faith and trusting God next to this raging river. Here's what's going to happen... You people are going to watch from a distance, the plan here is that you get no false ideas about who is doing what, so I want you back. The Lord calls attention to His sovereignty, Lord of all the earth, repeated twice, Lord of creation, and Lord over the enemy nations, and He says, I'm going in ahead of you. Get your priests who are called to mediate my presence with you, get them to hold the ark of the covenant, where I have chosen that my presence would dwell, and these priests are going to down in the water. I'm going down in the water through our priests. That's the formula, and when that happens, get ready to be amazed, the waters of the Jordan are going to be cut off. God is going to turn the spigot off. And way upstream those waters are going to dam up. And you are going to walk through on dry ground. That's how you are going to get across. we aren't building boats. No manmade way.

Plan- God gets the glory, they get the blessing. We must make room for the supernatural. Is God necessary for your life? Are you pursuing Him with desperation. Does God have to show up in your life? If you took away God's presence, would anything change? Are you actively thinking, God if you don't show up in my family, in this ministry, in my neighbor, it wont work. Where does God have to show up in your life? If you don't have an answer to that you are living too much in the natural.

So then we see God demonstrate His power through the actual crossing... let's see what happens...

God's power in the crossing

14 So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, 15 and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), 16 the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing

down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. 17 Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

The people do exactly as they are told, and God shows up just as He promised. We get this interesting detail in parenthesis, that the Jordan is overflowed. Not only is it serving as a cliffhanger, it adds to the climax. The place where they are crossing, about the worst possible place to crossover at the worst possible time of year. this is no lazy river at six flags... this thing is rushing, and its flooded. If they are going to cross, this is the worst spot to do it. This river is dark because of the flood, strong current, ominous flowing down to the dead sea. About a mile wide and several feet deep.

Why? God wants to show off His power, but not just to that end, but that they would trust Him right. He stacks the deck against Himself so He can show How great He is. The city of Adam is about 20 miles north. So this ominous, overflowing, raging torrent of a river dries up immediately beneath their feet. And more than that, it piles up some 20 miles upstream at Adam. And below them the water travels down to Salt Sea. Not only are they on dry ground, they can't even see the water anywhere around them.

And we get this beautiful picture of the v.17 "priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD standing firmly on dry ground... right in the middle of where this river was. And while they do, all Israel passes over on dry ground. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, luggage, animals. An unbelievable scene.

The narrator then emphasizes, "until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan."

God puts on an unthinkable display of His power, accomplishing His purposes. And the Israelites get the blessing. God shows up. God is glorified. His people are blessed.

Here they go. Their great big obstacle of a river, gone. They just had to walk across.

We get some more details of this crossing later in chapter 4...

4:10b The people passed over in haste. 11 And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people. 12 The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. 13 About 40,000 ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14 On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life."

Joshua is exalted. The transition of leadership and trust from the people is complete.

15 And the LORD said to Joshua, 16 "Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." 17 So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." 18 And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.

We see the completion of the journey, like symmetrical bookends, the priests go in with the ark, the waters cut off. The people cross. The priests and the ark come out. The waters return. There's no mistaking that as long as the ark was in the river the waters wouldn't flow. When God's presence was there, the water wouldn't flow.

God was in charge here. God and God alone was on display. You might be dressed for war, and there's going to be some fighting in your future, but know for certain that God is the One who fights for you. Crossing over

into the Land was all about God, and taking the land is all about God. This was a worship ceremony with priests.

Our war is a worship war! want to war on addiction and religious hypocrisy, worship! Fall on your face!

The promise was also fulfilled that the people would know that God is with them and He will give them the Land. We read later in 5:1...-

5:1 As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.

Though the crossing was complete, God still had some very specific instructions for them... they needed to make a memorial of the miraculous event.

God's People remember the crossing

4:1 When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, 3 and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 5 And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, 6 that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."

8 And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there. 9 And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. 10 For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.

This is where it gets a little confusing in terms of timeline. The narrator is not simply relaying facts in a sequence, but using a number of literary devices to heighten the sense of drama and draw ourselves in to particular details. The first line is likely better translated "when they were finishing passing over", so this is sometime during the crossing. Here we see the twelve men again, which we saw briefly earlier. These twelve men, that represent the 12 tribes of all the people, are to take 12 stones from where the priests feet were and be set up as a memorial.

Why? Does God need a stature, does He need their worship. No, God doesn't need anything. It would be a memorial for their sake. **v.6 so that it would be a sign among you.** Among you has two ways that its fleshed out. For one, its for you who crossed over. Every time you see it you are going to remember what God did for you. It's been said before that one of the greatest enemies of faith is forgetfulness. They were forgetful people, easily forgetting God and forgetting His power. The same is true for us. We so easily forget. And what is to be noted here is that God is not saying, hey, don't worry, I'm going to be doing crazy miracles like this for you so that you will always have fresh huge miracles to stand in awe about. He says, rather, remember what I have done for you. To walk by faith and not by sight, and faith remembers and focuses on God, faith does not forget. How are you remembering what God has done for you?

These stones are also going to proclaim God's goodness to the next generation. They weren't there, they didn't get the physical experience of going through it, but God wants them to know it as their own history.

19 The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. 20 And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. 21 And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' 22 then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' 23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, 24 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

So how does this apply to us? If the Bible's not mere history, what is this saying to us? Lastly, we turn to see

Christ in the Crossing

First, this story points us to a greater promise land and a greater obstacle to that land. Our promise land is God, and the river Jordan that divides us from entering that land is our sin. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all outside the garden in the wilderness, deserving of judgement and wrath.

The impossibility of crossing the river points us to the impossibility of us meriting our way to God, the impossibility of cleaning ourselves and making ourselves holy.

Joshua points us to the greater Joshua to come, who doesn't lead us into physical land, but who leads us into God's presence. Over a thousand years later, we would see this river again, as a man by the name of Jesus of Nazareth would show up to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. The Father says this is my son.

Joshua points us to Jesus, the chosen and called servant of God. The promise of the servant being exalted ultimately points us to Jesus. That through the crossing of the river sin and death, the way that God saves us, would be done in such a way to exalt Jesus. So that we would worship Him as the name above all names and trust His provision and protection against all our enemies.

How? The ark of the covenant is the presence of God, its how God chose to dwell with a sinful people. In Jesus is the fullness of God, where His presence fully dwells in the person of Jesus, who is the Word of God. The ark goes by alone down in the water and comes up out the other side.

For the people of Israel this was not a military march but a worship ceremony. In v.19 "The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month." This is the exact day almost 40 years before when they were enslaved in Egypt, on the 10th day of the month when Israel was told to prepare for Passover. Inside this ceremony is linked to redemption from Egypt in the sacrifice of a perfect lamb. Jesus the Lamb doesn't just hold back the waters of judgement, He absorbs them.

And so we have in the lamb and in the crossing the Divine Plan to lead God's people back to Himself. We have a picture of the cross of Christ. The people stand back as the presence of God goes down into the water. Water a sign of judgment, remember the flood, and as the presence of the Lord stands in the gap, destruction and death cannot come. Instead of waters piling up miles away, our sins pile up on Jesus. We go through on dry ground because the Son of God takes pays the penalty for our sin.

Which brings us deeper into the rich symbolism here. The ark was carried by priests. Priests are the divinely chosen mediators of God presence. The priests stand in the gap between God and sinful man. Jesus is our Great High Priest.

The priests stay in the water until all is finished... reminding us of Jesus on the cross saying, it is finished. The fulness of the debt has been paid. Our sins, "river" removed as far as the east is from the west.

And as the priests step out of the water, so Jesus comes out of the grave, our risen and reigning Lord and Savior. We are the people of God that have crossed over from death to life, from stranger to friend, from orphan to sons and daughters, from sinners to saints. Our inheritance is God forever on the basis of His act of salvation.

Church, this is our memorial forever. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ. If He has given us Christ, how will He not also give us everything else? We can face our enemies because Christ has died and risen. We will be worshiping Jesus as the Lamb slain for us for all eternity with all the tribes and tongues around the throne in heaven.

Our main application is worship and remember.

In the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper we regularly, in a formal and specific way, remember Christ. But we also remember by preaching the gospel to ourselves, staying in prayer, reading our bible, gathering together with the saints. It's for us, and its for our children and the watching world.