

A Trophy Room for Memories

Second in Command: Life of Joshua – Part III

Joshua 3-4

Introduction

Today, we will continue our study of the book of Joshua. I invite your attention to Joshua chapters 3 and 4.

As the Israelites planned to enter the promised land, one point must be made perfectly clear – and it happens to be the same point that we must understand as we pursue victorious Christian living. Joshua 3 and 4 will not give us one of many ways to experience victory in Christian living – it will give us the *only* way to experience victory in our Christian pursuit. It was important for the Israelites, and it is important for us, to note not only what God did, but why God did it, and what it took, on their part, for it to happen.

If you were with us in our last discussion, you may remember that the Israelite spies returned from Jericho with the report that all the people were terrified at their coming. So, at their report, the people of Israel gather all of their things and travel the seven or eight miles to the edge of the swirling Jordan River and camp there for three or four days.

Preparing . . . To See God Work!

As the day of the crossing of the Jordan River approaches, Joshua, unlike most military leaders, tells the Israelite people, not to sharpen their swords and polish their shields, but to, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow you will see the hand of the Lord.”

The key verse – Joshua 3:5

Look at Joshua 3:5.

Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”

In other words, there is the path of victory that makes important the purity of man and the power of God. So Joshua tells the Israelites to consecrate themselves.

What is consecration? At this time, it meant several things: washing their clothes, taking a physical bath, having a time of confession and a time of personal searching. Consecration was something taken very seriously by the Israelite.

Joshua tells them to consecrate themselves. Why? Because for God’s power to be revealed, His people must be pure. Perhaps the reason we do not see God’s power as much, is because we have fallen, in our part, to present to Him pure vessels.

Why must the Israelites go through all of the bother of consecration? Because it is critical that the Israelites recognize that God’s power will pull back the Jordan waters and be able to sense all of the value of that miracle.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is possible for you and I to experience the power of God; it is possible for us to see God’s hand at work, yet never sense the value.

The Israelites needed to understand, when they saw the Jordan waters go back, that if God is powerful enough to do that, then He is powerful enough to dispel the attack of the Amorite. If God can pull back the raging Jordan waters, He is powerful enough to help them overcome the Gergashite warrior who lives to fight. It was important that they notice

that if God is powerful enough to help them enter the land, He is powerful enough to give them the land.

An unconsecrated heart in life, ladies and gentlemen, in effect, blinds our eyes. Does it bother you that you could possibly go through life, with God at work, but never really recognize all that is happening? Does it bother you that God could work in the routine affairs of your life, but you completely miss it because there is the lack of consecration in your heart?

Joshua announces to the people, not to sharpen their swords, at this point, but,

. . . “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”

God does not need clever people to conquer Canaan, He needs clean people through whom He can conquer Canaan.

Now the difficulty facing these people is the swirling Jordan River. The word “Jordan” literally means “descender,” because it descended a thousand feet as it made its way from the Sea of Galilee down to the Arabah Sea, or the Salt Sea, which we know today as the Dead Sea. That thousand foot descent caused a natural current – not a torrent, but a current. However, during the flood season; that is, during their harvest time, it would overflow its banks and fill, what we call, the Jordan flood plain. The flood plain was between one and three miles wide. Every year, the Jordan would overflow its banks and cover an area of as much as a mile or more in width.

The text tells us that it is this exact time that the Israelites are standing on the edge of the Jordan River – the flood season when the Jordan has overflowed its banks. So they are not looking at a small current or a shallow stream that with a good run and a jump, they will make it. They are looking at a mile wide river with a strong current of rushing water. Humanly speaking, there was no possible way for the children of Israel to cross over. It was, to them, the major obstacle; it was an impossibility.

Adding to this suspense is a little phrase in the last part of Joshua 3:4. Look at that verse – there is a volume in it.

. . . for you have not passed this way before.

I love this. Remember that this generation, apart from Joshua and Caleb, had not seen God part the waters of the Red Sea. They did not have any experience to draw from and say, “Oh, I’ve seen Him do that before, so I know He can do it now.”

These people, I am sure, were standing there wondering, “God, You want us in the land, but now we’ve got this problem in our way. It’s about a mile wide and it’s very deep. I’m not sure we’re very good swimmers and I know our children aren’t, not to mention our cattle and all of our belongings.”

The key role – Joshua 3:6

This river was a significant problem for the Israelites. I think this is the reason we need to understand the significance of the ark of the covenant. Look at Joshua 3:6.

And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, “Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people.

The priests got in the front of the line. Skip to Joshua 3:9-10.

Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, “Come here, and hear the words of the Lord your God.” Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite.”

And all the other parasites! Continue to Joshua 3:11-12.

“Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan. Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe.”

The ark of the covenant is leading the way. They will know the reason in a moment. Look at Joshua 3:13-14.

“It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap.” So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people,

We will stop at this point to better understand the ark of the covenant.

The ark was a rather simple two by four foot box. It was overlaid with gold, which made it very beautiful.

Inside the ark, there were several important things. There was the rod of Aaron, which had supernaturally budded to life. There was a jar of manna, which served as a constant reminder of God's provision when they had nothing. There was also the set of tablets of stone on which God, with His own hand, wrote the Commandments. You may remember that the first set of tablets was crashed to the ground by an angry Moses. On the second set, God wrote with His own finger, emblazoning the Commandments into the stone. That set of stone tablets was inside the ark, as well.

The lid of the ark was gold. On top of the lid were two angels, or cherubim, facing each other. Their wings were spread out toward them, covering their faces. The people, at that time, believed that the power of God, or literally, the presence of God, rested in the cradle of the wings of these angels. This is not like a popular movie that has Him in the box. God is there, as it were, in the crest of the wings.

So the ark is supposed to lead the way across the Jordan River. What did that mean? It meant that they were not just a people going for a trek or on a camping trip into this land to see if they kind of liked it there. They were not going in optimistic in the hope that the people would open their arms and say, "Oh, the Israelites! Welcome!"

No. They were people of God being led by God. And, with God in front leading the way, they, by faith, were to follow.

This is where the challenge comes in. You may have noticed, as we read the verses, that they talked about the priests. When would God part the waters? He would part the waters when the priests dipped their feet into the water.

Now I would not have wanted to be a priest in that day. However, if I were, I am sure that I, and all of the priests heading toward the water's edge carrying the ark, would probably be saying, in Hebrew, "Lord, help me please, or we're sunk."

Why did God wait until, as it were, "the midnight hour"? Why did He not take care of the river the night before? Why did He not just roll back the waters and blow the moisture out of the dirt, so that

when the Israelites got up in the morning, they could say, "Oh, great! Let's get our stuff and go through."

Why would God go through this? Why would the process be that the priests must first put their feet in the water's edge and *then* He will act?

Why is it that God waits so long in order to come through for you? Have you ever wondered why?

I think there is a fundamental principle in this, ladies and gentlemen. As God leads us into the land of rest, the land of victory, He is much more interested in developing His people than in displaying His power. We get stuck on wanting His power and *now!* God, however, wants to develop the faith of His people, so He waited until the last moment.

Watching . . . God At Work!

Now let us watch God work. Look at Joshua 3:15-17.

and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest),

that the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho.

And 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 crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

The water is now piled up as far as thirty miles away at the city of Adam. Why would God do that? I think He did it so this mountain of water would be a testimony to His power and also, so it could serve as a warning that, "*My people are coming!*"

This gave the people of the land another opportunity to repent and to throw down their arms. They would see God coming.

I have read a number of books on this miracle. Some were written by people of liberal persuasion and even more were written by people of conservative persuasion. It has been quite interesting, and almost laughable, to read the liberal commentators as they try to dance their way around these miraculous events.

Ladies and gentlemen, it cannot be done, if you take this at face value.

The sequence of miraculous events

Let me give you the sequence of all of the miracles involved.

1. The waters were at flood stage when the Israelites crossed (Joshua 3:15b).
2. The waters were stopped as promised (Joshua 3:16a).
3. The timing was exactly when the feet of the priests hit the water (Joshua 3:15b-16a).

I read the commentary of one gentleman who suggested that there was an earthquake uphill somewhere and the land caved in and stopped the water. Is it not amazing that it happened right at the moment when the priests stepped into the water and that it was cleared up when the priests got out of the water? That takes an awful lot more faith, I think, than to believe that God did this.

4. The wall of water was held in place while the entire nation crossed (Joshua 3:17).

It could have been as long as a day, since more than two million people are crossing.

5. The soft river bottom became dry at once (Joshua 3:17).

You either have to cut the word “dry” out of that verse in your Bible or you are going to have to believe it. The river became dry in the snap of a finger.

6. The waters returned immediately, as soon as the crossing was completed (Joshua 4:18).

Remembering . . . God Did Work!

Now one incident takes place in Joshua chapter 4 that I want to spend the remainder of our time on. Look at Joshua 4:2-3.

Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, and command them, saying, “Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.”

Skip to Joshua 4:19-20. This is the first camping site.

Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is critically important that we prepare to see God work – that we consecrate our lives; that there is purity on our part; that we confess sin – so that the hand of God can work. It is also important that, by preparing, we are able to see God work – that we can put the facts together; that we can see His power and His presence – which is a wonderful thing to be able to observe. It is equally as critical to remember that God did work.

Perhaps one of the greatest deterrents to the victorious Christian life is forgetfulness. In a marriage, similarly, the greatest threat is not something that happens overnight, but the constant erosion of forgetting the significance of the vow. One of the greatest threats to the Christian life is walking through life and never pausing, never stopping to take note that God has worked.

Probably all Christians, and perhaps some at this moment, have experienced the point in their lives that they have wondered, “Is God really at work?” The only reason we wonder is because we have forgotten that He already has.

As one man wrote, “The superstructure of our lives are built upon the foundation of our memories. We are instructed by our memories as to how to live now.”

Another wrote, “Memories of God’s hand and power create the soil in which our present roots of faith sink deeply and from which we receive nourishment.”

Now, God’s direction was very clear to Joshua. Look at Joshua 4:21-23. Joshua would repeat the message.

He said to the sons of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall inform your children, saying, ‘Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.’ For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed;”

Memorial stones

So the people of Israel set up a memorial of stones. Why is this so important? Let me suggest several reasons.

1. First, memorial stones help us to overcome the tendency to forget.

I can be so preoccupied with my immediate problem and the supposed lack of spiritual resources that I forget that God has already provided the necessary resources in the past. The reason for this is that we, by nature, tend to remember the negative and to catalog the defeats – just bump us and we can spit them out. We have the failures and the defeats alphabetized in our memories. They are so constantly in our conscious mind that when we face trouble, what do we run to first? The failures and defeats. As a result, we continue propagating the defeated life.

2. A second reason the memorial stones are so important is that they remind us of the importance of thanksgiving.

God would provide, a number of times, in impossible situations. Perhaps today, you are right in the middle of an impossible situation. I do not know what it is, but you do. That monument from the past impossibility, allows you the opportunity to stop and thank God for what He has done. So often we can get caught up in asking Him to do something now, that we forget to praise Him for what He did then.

3. The third reason I would suggest is very clear in this text, and that is, so the people would be challenged to share the story with the next generation.

Several years later, at “Gilgal National Park,” there is a heap of twelve stones. An Israelite father comes with his young son or daughter. The child asks, “Daddy, what do these stones mean? What are they here for?”

The father can say, “Why don’t we sit here and let me tell you what happened. This is where God came through with tremendous power, so that you and I can enjoy everything that we have today.”

What will our children, or the next generation, hear from us? Will they hear that God is worth following? Will they hear that God is powerful? Will they hear that God can be trusted? Or, will they only hear a recollection of defeats, despairs, and discouragements?

Whether you have little children, grown children, or grandchildren, you have a tremendous opportunity to give to the next generation the message that God is alive; that God works; that God is powerful; that God can be trusted.

Building your personal trophy room

Now, I want to take this one step further, in terms of practicality, because I think we all have the same problem of forgetfulness. I want to suggest that we begin to build, what we will call, a trophy room.

In this trophy room, we will put the mementos of God’s power and His presence. It may be a journal, where we write things down. It might be a computer disk, where we have a file that we activate when we want to make another entry. It could be putting things to song. It could be including them in our personal prayer life. Whatever it may be, let us build a trophy room to fill with the power and providence of God.

Let me suggest some entries that you could make in your trophy room.

1. First, and let me make this very clear, refuse any entry of spiritual defeat or failure.

Why? Because we want to ignore them?

Oh, no. The trouble is not that we ignore them, the trouble is that we cannot forget them. They will always be there, so we do not need to write these down. This will be a trophy room, not a boxing ring where the good will fight the bad. This will be a place where we remember what God has done. So refuse, at the very beginning, to enter anything of that nature.

2. Secondly, let me suggest that we revisit places of spiritual significance.

Maybe in our minds, we can go down memory lane and remember a particular place of great spiritual significance. Perhaps you remember that church where you trusted Christ, or a campus dormitory room where you were disciplined, or a place where you met an individual who impacted you in your spiritual walk. Revisit these places; go back, if you physically can.

I would say to do this especially if you are thinking something like, “God is not at work in my life.” You have forgotten that He is and you have forgotten that He has been.

3. Thirdly, remember people who made a spiritual impact on your life.

There may be such people in your life right now. In my life, my wife and children impact me daily to live as I ought to live. I can add to that list, my parents. I can add a brother, who is in the ministry. I can jot down, into my journal, some college professors and a number of seminary professors. I can also add people in this church who have impacted me in a spiritual way.

Let me suggest, once you have remembered these names, that you call them. Be prepared for a surprised reaction on their end, because they probably do not have any idea that they impacted you. Spiritual people do not recognize that. Tell them what they did for you.

Jot into your journal, or whatever your trophy room might be, not just events, not just places, but people. Then, the next time you mope around and think, “God doesn’t care about me; He’s not at work in my life,” stop and hit yourself with the question, “If that’s true, why in the world did He spend so much creative design to bring these people into my life at different crossroads?” That should wake you up to realize and say, “Wow! He has worked! I’m just ignoring His work now – unable to see it because of the valley.”

4. Let me suggest a fourth, and that is, rekindle moments of spiritual decision.

Do you remember the time you raised your hand or knelt at an altar or wrote a letter – that point in time when you said, “Yes,” to God? Perhaps you can remember the time when you committed your marriage or your home or your career to God. Go back and rekindle those moments of spiritual decision.

A few years ago, I went back to the home where I was raised. My parents lived in the same home for nineteen years. My brothers and I were raised there and when I went to college, they moved. There was a very special place in that house and God motivated me, I believe, to go back and rekindle a particular moment in that place. So when my family was visiting my parents, I got in the car and headed to the house, which was about forty-five minutes away.

I pulled up to the house and, of course, if you have ever been back to a place like that, you notice how different it looks than you remember. The front yard was such a tiny little patch, yet a touchdown seemed so long back then. It was also growing grass, which was a miracle – it never did that when my brothers and I were growing up! I walked up and knocked on the front door and a gal answered the

door. She looked like she was about twenty or twenty-one years of age and was carrying a baby on her hip. I, rather awkwardly, said, “I’d like to come in and look around – this is where I was raised.”

She said, “Well far out, man, come on in.”

I became a little nervous about what my room might look like, at that particular point! I looked around and everything was much smaller than I remembered. I went up the stairs and turned left and walked into what had been my room. It was kind of a glorified closet – a five by seven with a little rug and a little bed. It was still about the same. I walked into that room, and I wanted to go in there for one reason only. I stood where, as an eighteen year old, I knelt one night and said to God, “Lord, I’m making a decision to give You my life now.”

I stood there until she got nervous and wondered what I was doing. I explained to her and eventually, left. That visit did a lot for me.

I would suggest you do the same, if you can. If you cannot physically go, then at least remember the places of spiritual decision, the people who impacted you spiritually, and the decisions that you made that impacted your life.

5. Let me suggest one more, and that is, record the moments of spiritual victory.

Do you remember a time that God answered a prayer? More than likely, you, like me, forgot what you prayed about last month. It probably came to pass, but at that particular time, it struck us as insignificant or small. Write it down then; enter it in your trophy room.

Perhaps you remember the time a loved one, that you had been praying for over a long period of time, came to Jesus Christ. Maybe you remember the time that financial relief came from nowhere. Remember the times that God came through in a very visible, prominent way, and record them.

Do you remember a time of darkness, when you were in a valley, and God gave you special verses? Have you ever gone back and read those verses again? By nature, we remember the valley; we remember the darkness of the night. Because of that, the pain, the disappointment, and the despair is fresh. Combat that with fresher memories of God’s providence.

I like to imagine that King David had a trophy room. He was a man, and men are pretty bad about keeping things like that! Some of you guys have twenty year old bowling trophies stuck somewhere

that you would not dare throw away! I have imagined that David had a room like that and, this week, I have thought of what it must have looked like. I can remember keeping some special things for myself and I would bet that David kept a few things too.

Perhaps David's trophy room has stone walls and a fireplace. When you look at the fireplace, you are struck immediately, with the fact that lying right in front of it, is a bearskin rug – the one David killed. Perhaps, mounted over the fireplace, is the stuffed head of a lion – the one he killed as a boy. I think the gravitating thing in the room is one particular wall on which is mounted a huge display of armor. There is a Philistine helmet that he recovered when the army fled, a large breastplate of bronze, a long sword, and a huge spear with a bronze head – all of which belonged to Goliath. I imagine one of the most prized possessions is hanging on the mantle from a peg, and that is, a well-worn fabric chord with a leather pouch sewn in the middle – David's old sling. Maybe, tucked away on a shelf somewhere, is a little piece of cloth – the cloth he cut from Saul's robe. It is a tremendous display of God's grace in his life. Rather than plunging his spear into the body of his enemy, he cut a piece from his robe to let him know he had been there. Perhaps David kept that too.

Where do you keep your memories of God's power? Do you pray them back to God? Do you record them in a journal? Do you type them? Do you sing them? Or, do you forget them?

It was so significant to God that the Israelite's remember this miracle, that He said, "I want you to take twelve ordinary stones. . .".

There is a principle in this, by the way. Memorials do not need to be dazzling; they do not need to be sensational to be significant – they can be just a pile of stones.

To the world, your answered prayers would probably be simple. The way that God came through in your life would probably not put any sizzle into a public church meeting. You might ask, "Hey, have you heard what God did?" but perhaps no one else would care. However, between you and God, they are priceless.

Do you have some way of remembering God's work in your life? Perhaps it is time to start.

In doing so, in the same way that Joshua 4 ends, we would be able to say, "In the valley; in the time of difficulty, by looking at our trophies, we may know that,"

. . . the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that [we may trust] the Lord [our] God forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/27/1991 by Stephen Davey.

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