

Joshua Part 4: Boldly Going where no man has gone before

“Obstacles and Faith”

1. Review

- a. **Boldly going where we haven't been before.** The story of our lives if we dare to follow Jesus! If we play it safe...what is that? If we don't take risks...what will be our reward? If you really think about it, we are called to RE-present Jesus in our world, being Jesus to a lost, hurting, and broken world. He lives in us...and we live far short of the radical, world transforming, risk taking life that He did. Is it because we have become content with our “religious” routine and prefer it over a life of Holy Spirit power and transformation? When I look in the mirror, I think I play it WAY TOO SAFE, far too often. I often am content to stay safe, but powerless.
- b. In our text, Joshua is getting ready to cross the Jordan with his entire nation. But there is a problem. They don't have any boats and they don't have a bridge. And worse yet, the river isn't in its typical drought stage where they could possibly wade through it...its at flood stage and 3 or 4 times its normal width and depth. They certainly can't walk on water. What will they do?
 - i. What would you do? Set up camp and wait for Spring...that's probably what most of us would do.
 - ii. They have an obstacle and no way to get through it.

2. Chapter 3:1-17 *“Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. 2Three days later, the Israelite leaders went through the camp 3giving these instructions to the people: “When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, follow them. 4Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about a half mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don't come any closer.” 5Then Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do great wonders among you.” 6In the morning Joshua said to the priests, “Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river.” And so they started out. 7The LORD told Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all the Israelites. Now they will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. 8Give these instructions to the priests who are carrying the Ark of the Covenant: ‘When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop.’” 9So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the LORD your God says. 10Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. 11Think of it! The Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! 12Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. 13The priests will be carrying the Ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth. When their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will pile up there in one heap.” 14When the people set out to cross the Jordan, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. 15Now it was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, 16the water began piling up at a town upstream called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the city of Jericho. 17Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the LORD's covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by them. They waited there until everyone had crossed the Jordan on dry ground..”*

3. Insurmountable Obstacle or the Greatness of God?

- a. When we hear stories like this we tend to write them off to some great era of the past...as if somehow God wouldn't or couldn't do something like this today. That is the nature of obstacles...they test what we really believe about God. They reveal what kind of faith we have.
- b. **Obstacles. The dictionary defines an obstacle as “something that stands in your way or opposes you progress”.**
 - i. An obstacle is something that stands between where you are, and where you want to go.

- c. **Life is filled with obstacles.**
 - i. Some of them will be small, such as maybe a road block on the way to work, or some will be large, like diseases that keep you from being who and what you want to be.
 - ii. Randy Pausch, of recent fame and author of the book, “The Last Lecture” – recently died from Pancreatic cancer. He wrote a book of the lessons he learned from life...and he wrote it for his boys for whom he knew he wouldn’t be there for because of his disease. He said obstacles serve a purpose: He wrote that they “*give us a chance to show how badly we want something.*”
 - 1. If you come up against a wall in your pursuit of something in life, do you give up or do you find a way to get over, under or through the wall?
 - 2. **Unfortunately, many of us simply give up.** In fact, many of us have so little faith, that we actually declare the wall is from God and it must be His will that we give up.
 - d. There are spiritual obstacles in life as well.
 - i. These obstacles hinder us and stand in the way God’s blessings and inheritance for us.
 - ii. These obstacles stand between where we are in our walk with God and where we would like to and should be.
 - 1. Every one of us here needs to be closer to the Lord but the question remains, “why aren’t we?” Because we *have allowed* something to stand in our way.
 - 2. That spiritual obstacle – it is easy to describe it as a secret sin, bad habit, or a set of circumstances. But the truth is, most spiritual obstacles are of our own making. And the fact we have a bad habit or secret sin is really the symptom of our problem.
 - 3. We have become comfortable, indifferent to the Spirit of God, we’ve grown cold to the heart of God.
 - iii. Can God put an obstacle in our way? Of course! But prayer and discernment will help you discover who is the author of your obstacle. If God tells you to do something and something blocks your path...you must find a way over, around or through that obstacle! Any other response is a reflection of our cooling heart and passion for God.
4. V2-4 “*Three days later, the Israelite leaders went through the camp giving these instructions to the people: “When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, follow them. Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about a half mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don’t come any closer.”*”
- a. *Never traveled this way before...they will guide you.* The “they” actually refers to the Ark, which is the symbol of the Presence of God.
 - i. I find it fascinating that the Ark is taken to the front of the army, without protection of guards or swordsmen. In fact, it is carried by unarmed priests.
 - ii. There is a lesson to that. The Presence of God protects the army. Not the other way around!
 - 1. **The Presence of God precedes the visible power of God.**
 - 2. If you are looking for the Power of God, seek first His presence!
 - 3. In powerful moves of God throughout history, including when Jesus was on earth, people came to see the magic show, the signs and wonders, but had no room for the real presence of God (Jesus).
 - 4. In your life and mine, we must seek God’s face, God’s presence before we get to experience His power.
5. V5 .” *Then Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do great wonders among you.”*
- a. Why purify yourselves? “because (for) the Lord will do great wonders among you.”
 - i. Sanctify yourselves means they were to separate themselves from common things to focus in on the LORD

1. It is what we do when we fast and pray. We separate ourselves from common behaviors like eating, self-indulgent living, television...to pray and listen to God.

ii. Great wonders

1. The word for “wonders” is marvelous, wonderful, surpassing, extraordinary, be beyond one's power, be difficult to do, to be difficult to understand, to do an extraordinarily hard thing.
2. God was going to do something they couldn't understand, something impossible.

iii. Miracles today:

1. There are many so called Christians who are Cessationists, who believe that God stopped doing miracles through spiritual gifts in the first century. There are even some leading Southern Baptists who hold to these extreme views. They hold to the view that God has left us to our own devices, especially since we have drugs and doctors. THIS IS A LIE! God hasn't changed!
2. A pastor from Kenya was at a Ralph Bell Crusade in Bowling Green Kentucky and asked the question “Where are the “Miracles?” He went on to say, “We always have “Miracles at our services at home.”
3. What is wrong with this picture? Is our God the same in Kenya, Mozambique and Madison, Ohio? What is different? Us.
4. I could go on about the reason God does miracles.
 - a. Our American intellect can find a lot of reasons to deny them, but you only need to go to the third world where missionaries are striving against impossible odds and you will see and hear of them all day long.
 - b. Is God different? No, but the people are. They are hungry for God and they won't let unbelief stand in the way of them meeting God.
 - c. Heidi Baker video tonight, along with a guest from Crossroads who was in Mozambique Africa in 2006 and saw what God was doing there. Don't miss it!

6. V13-16 *“The priests will be carrying the Ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth. When their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will pile up there in one heap.” When the people set out to cross the Jordan, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. Now it was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, the water began piling up at a town upstream called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry.”*

- a. Stepping out in faith. Literally “getting your feet wet” When you look at the Grand River flowing in flood stage it is a frightening thing. The Jordan River was no different. They had to wonder, even fear a bit. Yet they obeyed because...?
- b. **God's power isn't limited by the size of the task** or the amount of water!
 - i. Imagine some folks muttering, “gee, it's flood time...I could believe it if it were just the trickle of the dry season.”
 - ii. I can believe God can heal a cold, but Cancer? He can heal a sore throat but give me a new knee? No way! Is anything too hard for God? It may be too big for our faith, but its not too big for God.
- c. The passage says that the water BEGAN to pile up the moment they put their feet in the water. The problem was that it stopped up some 20 miles upstream. But it was still flowing where they WERE. Did that make them retreat.
- d. Risk is required for faith to work. If you never fail you've never taken a risk. Even the word risk means that you “place something valuable in a position where it can be damaged, lost or exposed to danger.”
 - i. **Risk is one of the primary ingredients to a faith filled, supernatural lifestyle.**
 - ii. Yes, you might feel the burden of the Lord to share a scripture during service, but...what if you're wrong? What if the pastor tells me to sit down? What if everyone stares at me?

- iii. Or maybe you have a burden to pray for someone during the invitation time, but you are too embarrassed to get out of your seat and take a chance? Guess what. No risk, no amazement at the Power of God. No supernatural life. No miracles. Nothing. Just safe, boring and sad.
- e. Who knows how long the priests stood there in the river? It might have been a moment; but it may have been a long time - but in a situation like that, a moment seems like a long time!
 - i. We usually want the river to be dry before we even make a step; but God was truly calling Israel to step out in faith.
 - ii. Those priests stood in that river for quite some time before they saw anything happening. And the people stood on the banks of the river, watching this somewhat dangerous activity, without seeing anything happening for the first little while. Can you picture it? Joshua had said the river would stop, and we believe it, but so far... um, nothing's happening...
 - iii. Why am I making such a big deal about this? Because we always expect the miraculous to be instantaneous. And sometimes it is!
 - 1. And yet, more often I think the miraculous happens in our lives the same way it happened for those priests and Israelites.
 - a. *We have to wait. We have to stand in the water, fighting the current, believing in the promise, and then we see the miracle.*
 - b. Maybe God does it to test our faith, maybe He does it to prove His faithfulness and His presence prior to the miracle, maybe He does it to teach us how to be strong in the current, maybe He does it just because He works on a different agenda than we do.
 - c. But here is the key to the promise: He always comes through.
 - d. The Israelites most likely saw a gradual miracle – the water level dropped slowly but steadily
 - iv. What was God doing? *I believe He was developing a nation of conquerors.* These are only developed in the culture of faith. Faith requires risk. That is because risk opens the door to the great adventures in God.
 - 1. *Four wheeling – off road is where the beauty is, but you get stuck a lot! Risk is proportional to the reward. If you prefer comfort on a 4 lane highway in a comfortable safe car, you will never get to be a part o the big and beautiful stuff God is doing.*

7. FAITH gives GOD the opportunity to demonstrate his Power.

- a. I believe God waits upon our exercise of faith. When we exercise it, then He acts. **How long would He have waited for the Priests to step into the water?**
 - i. We as humans like to hold on to the familiar. But life in the Kingdom of God is messy. If you want a nice, neat organized life, you really eliminate most of the powerful works of God from your life.
 - ii. When churches create enough rules to keep the unexpected from happening in their services, the place becomes a museum, a mere monument to something that was once alive.
- b. I have heard that “fear will keep you from moving in the Spirit of God.”
 - i. Fear has many faces and disguises itself as dignity and wisdom. But underneath it conceals a scared believer who doesn't want to look bad.
 - ii. *Bill Johnson, noted author and pastor said, “The Holy Spirit is imprisoned in the bodies of unbelieving believers.”* (How about you?)

8. Invitation:

- a. Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible -- He does the things others cannot do. Won't you come for prayer or to have someone pray over you for that impossible thing God wants to do in your life? If God is telling you to get out of your seat and to pray for someone, do it at this time.

- b. How badly do you want God? Are you willing to overcome any obstacle to press in and touch His heart? I noticed that Jesus didn't turn away anyone who came to him for healing, and that "all who touched Him were healed." (Mt. 12) Yet it wasn't easy to get to Jesus, considering the crowds. What the bible doesn't tell us about is the people who did give up, who didn't press in. We hear the success stories...because anyone with the faith to press in, to get past the obstacles to get to Jesus was made whole. How many gave up before they got to Him? How many talked themselves out of a miracle and walked away because they weren't desperate enough?
- c.
- d. Allow God to work here. Let's pray.