

I. Set Up

A. Welcome, today is week two of Reset – our study of Joshua. And today we come to a big moment in Israel’s history. They are back at the East bank of the Jordan River. And the question is, will they obey God or not. It’s got lots of drama.

B. Read: Joshua 3:1-17

II. Intro

A. Sometimes there is a moment when you have to decide:

1. You are either turning left or you are turning right.
2. You are going to move across the country to take the job or you are not.
3. You are going to attend this school or this one.
4. You are going to jump in or not. Take the shot or not.
5. There comes a moment when you have to decide – when, to not decide is to decide.

B. And this is true with our relationship with God. Indeed, our passage today sets up that kind of a moment.

III. Last week we began a series called Reset, which is based out of the Book of Joshua.

A. We learned that the Book of Joshua begins with Moses dying and Joshua moving into leadership – which means he has really big shoes to fill.

B. In addition to taking over for a leader who has been “the man” for forty years – through all kinds of trials; in addition to that challenge, Joshua is taking over right as the Jews return to the East bank of the Jordan River, where they had been forty years earlier – and where their parents had failed. God had told their parents that he had given them the Promised Land. It was theirs. But they got spoofed by the report of the spies and voted not to go in – they opted not to obey God, not to trust His directions. And as a result, they lost their opportunity. And instead of moving into the Promised Land, they spent the next forty years wandering around in the desert and dying off.

C. As Joshua takes over, they are back. It’s actually a whole new group of people. Every adult other than Joshua and Caleb have subsequently passed away. It’s the same families but a different generation; it’s the Jews – the descendants of Abraham and Sara, the people of God.

D. And it’s their second chance. And last week I noted that second chances – resets, do-overs, take-twos – are: 1) wonderful; but 2) they are rare; and 3) many people waste them.

E. I then went on to suggest that COVID is giving us a reset opportunity.

IV. Today’s passage – the third chapter in Joshua, the passage read a bit earlier – describes the events. What we see is that:

A. The two spies Joshua had sent into the Promised Land to check it out have returned from Jericho. And they are full of good news. Joshua 2 reads, the spies “hearts were bursting with joy as they said, ‘The LORD has handed over the entire land to us.’”

- B. When he hears this, Joshua immediately dispatches runners to go throughout the vast camp of Israel – there are two million people there - announcing that first thing the next morning, they would be moving from where they were set up – a couple miles from the water – to the banks of the Jordan River.
- C. But then things get dicey. As they approached the Jordan, everyone gets to see it at flood stage – and it’s daunting.
- D. The Jordan is not normally a wide river. It’s a barrier:
1. It’s one geographically but also metaphorically. It is spoken of a lot in the Bible as a barrier. In fact:
 - a) It shows up in all kinds of songs as a metaphor.
 - b) And in modern life, crossing the Jordan is soo much of a metaphor that it’s a bit of a cliché’. There was even a TV show called Crossing Jordan.
 2. Geographically it was a barrier for three reasons:
 - a) First, because the Jews could not swim. They had spent their entire lives in the desert. No pool parties for them. No YMCA swim classes on the docket for the kids.
 - b) Second, when you can’t swim a river doesn’t need to be that wide to be a barrier – just wider than you can jump – and it was that. At Gilgal where they were crossing it’s 100’ wide. But what makes the Jordan a bit unique is that it has a significant vertical drop.
 - (1) It drops over 100 feet per mile, which is hefty. I spent more time than I care to admit skimming hydrology reports trying to confirm this. I could not I think it’s quite steep.
 - (2) Which not only means it has a current, but it cuts into the bank. The first step can be a big one.
 3. However, none of what I’ve just told you really matters, because at the moment they were to cross it was at flood stage. So, instead of being 100 feet across it was a mile across. And it is raging.
 - a) During flood stage the current can be 40 miles per hour.
 - b) And the plain surrounding the river was thick with brush and thickets, which makes it even harder to cross. One writer said, "it was not the river so much as the jungle that was difficult to cross."
 4. So that is what the people see. We’ve waited for forty years to get to the Promised Land. We are almost there! Again! We are ready to go. Now, all we need to do is.... cross this utterly uncrossable one-mile wide raging river.
 5. Which is why, for three days, nothing happens. They camp on the bank, but do not move. You could likely smell the fear and confusion. “We have waited a long time for this. And we believe God is with us. But... this is impossible.”
- E. And maybe that is where you are at the moment – with your own "personal Jordan, whatever that is. You feel like you are up against some impossible challenges. You do not see any way forward.

F. You are stalled, stuck, whatever. You read about God’s promises and you want to get to the promised land, and you hear people say, “God can turn ‘No way into a highway,’ and you know that what is impossible with us is possible for God, but... there is no crossing this river.

V. So what happens? Well, Joshua 3 tells us:

A. After three days, a cry goes out to everyone to get ready – which means, pack up the tent. And also, consecrate yourselves

1. The Hebrew word means "prepare, dedicate, pray, repent, get right with God. "

a) I remember saying this to two of my boys when we were sailing. We were crossing Lake Michigan. The weather had 15% chance of light rain. We were motoring because there was no wind. And all of the sudden the wind kicked up and in minutes I watched it go to 25 mph with gusts of 40.

b) As a side note, I don’t like to sail in anything over 15. And there is a black row of clouds up ahead and I can see the waves headed our way. And they came - 8 foot waves crashing over the bow. And I woke up both boys who were sleeping and said, “put on your life jackets and now would be a great time to confess any unconfessed sin, because we are heading into that.”

2. Joshua says, “We are going to cross the uncrossable. We are going to follow the will of the Lord. I want no sin in the camp!”

B. The next thing he said was that, the priests were going to go first – with the Ark of the Covenant

1. This was the box that held: 1) the stone tablets upon which God had written the Ten Commandments; 2) some manna, a reminder of God's gracious provision during the previous forty years; and also 3) Aaron's rod--a dead stick that miraculously grew leaves and almonds to validate the power of God. The Ark was symbolic of God’s faithfulness and presence.

2. If you are a Raiders of the Lost Ark fan, this is the lost ark the Germans wanted – thinking it would help them win the war.

3. If you were here last week, let me say, this is another foreshadowing of Christ. Jesus is the real Ark of the Covenant. He is the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments; he is better than Mana – he is the Bread of Life; He is better than a stick that came back to life – he is the one who resurrects from the dead. He is God’s presence.

C. So, there is – as always – a big neon sign pointing to Christ. But as far as the story goes, they are told that the Levites will approach the water carrying the Ark of the Covenant – which represents God’s presence with them. God is going first. And they are to stay one-half mile back on the bank – so they didn’t get too close to God (which would mean death) and so they can watch. And they are to be ready to follow.

D. And then we get the big moment. The priests – who can’t swim – are to step into the Jordan and stop. This is all about trusting God to act.

1. The last time I was in Israel I went to the Jordan to think about this moment, and two things stood out. First, the water is dirty. You cannot see into it at all. So, if it was like that 2,000 years ago you could not tell if the water was an inch deep or ten feet; and second, the bank was cut away – which suggests deep right away.

2. Now given that it's flood stage – and it's 50 times wider than normal, this doesn't appear to matter. But when I stood there my thought was, you would be taking a big step into the void. And if you couldn't swim, this was going to be a scary moment, of trust.

E. That is the story that is set up.

VI. There are a few other things you need to understand to appreciate what is going on here.

A. First, everyone is watching. The people are all a half mile back and up the bank. So, this moment is on display. It's not just the priests stepping into the river who are at risk. If this doesn't work, Joshua is in deep weeds.

B. Second, this ask – this “make a decision, plant a flag, go-all-in-ask, is not unlike the other asks God makes. In Luke 15, Jesus turns to the crowds following him and says:

1. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. This is hyperbole. It was a common way of speaking at the time. The point is one of emphasis. He is not calling on us to hate others. We are to love others. But our love for God is to be so intense – so much more – that by comparison, our love for others is hate. Jesus is not interested in half-hearted responses.

2. This fall we will look at what Jesus said to the church in Laodicea. “I wish you were hot or cold, but not lukewarm. I spit you out of my mouth.” In other words, put your weight down. If you are in, be in.

3. This ask is consistent with all of the other radical asks Jesus makes. He doesn't do small asks. He is not willing to be co-pilot. He is not up for casual commitments. He doesn't do second. He offers to be savior and Lord. We will see more of this next week.

C. A third point I would like to develop is that, in addition to “jump-in moments” – crossing the line, dynamic, do-or-die, now-or-never moments, a lot of the Christian life is a slow pull. It's a long obedience in the same direction. In fact, in some ways it's less about big moments that it is about a disciplined, tenacious, consistent journey.

1. In the online devotions this week, I have been exploring Hebrews 2. And one of the verses there asks, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.” Neglect is a word that doesn't sound like failing to step in. It sounds like a slow drift from Christ.

D. There is more to see. We are moving quickly in Joshua. I want to be sure you know that Joshua is a pretty good guy. You are familiar with the line, “Choose this day who you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

1. He is the one who said it. Joshua modeled the commitment God is calling us to emulate when he told the nation. "

- E. But let me note this: it worked! Joshua gave the order, the priests stepped into the Jordan and then stopped, and the Lord parted the water. The text reads – ch 3, vs. 15:
1. As soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 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 (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.
- F. They stepped out and God acted.
- G. Faith honors God and God honors faith.
1. Not always in such a dramatic way – but God is for us and He will steer us and guide us as we move ahead.
 2. And I believe as we humbly pray and humbly move forward, he gives us what we pray for or what we would pray for if we knew all He knows.
- H. The passage says that as soon as they stepped in, someone noticed that the water was receding. The thunder of the roaring river then gave way to the thunder of the people moving in a great swarm which extended a mile or more.
1. Remember, this isn't 100 people going single file, this is 2 million people plus animals. This is a big miracle. So big, in fact, that a song was written about it.
 2. Psalm 114:3-7 records it: The sea looked and fled; the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills, like lambs. Why was it, sea, that you fled? Jordan, that you turned back? Mountains, that you skipped like rams? Hills, like lambs? (Here's the answer) Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.
- I. And they are told to mark this day in order to have a bit more faith and courage in the next trial.
- J. As we read into chapter four you see they are told to build an altar. The text says:
1. When all the people had passed over Jordan, Joshua commanded one man from each of the 12 tribes to get a rock from the midst of Jordan and build a memorial on the Canaan side.
 2. These verses tell us that the purpose of the memorial was to remind successive generations of the power and faithfulness of God on behalf of His people. That memorial would be an important landmark to those who would come after.
- K. If you dig into the chapter you see that they actually built two memorials – one on the bank after they had crossed. And one in the middle of the river bed – that would be quickly covered over and invisible to everyone but God.
1. One was a reminder to the people of God's faithfulness. And one was a reminder to God of their faithfulness.
- L. I have a collection of rocks – some from my Uncle the geologist. Others I collected from various places.

1. Two from mountains I climbed, one from Mars Hill, where Paul preached. (I did not mark them and can no longer remember which is which.
 2. But let me offer you a rock – they are up here for you to take. If you want to mark this day.
 3. And let me suggest there are other ways you might plant a flag: you might decide – OK, I am in.
 - a) I am signing up for a small group.
 - b) Today, I am singing up to be baptized.
 - c) I am going to stop being Luke Warm. I am going to stop hesitating between faith and indecision.
 - d) Maybe today is a day you want to place your faith in Christ.
- M. We have sign up options for you – and we have rocks for you. Do what makes sense.
- VII. And as we close, let me let you in on two little “secrets.”
- A. We generally regret not acting. Psychologists tell us that when we look back over our lives, we are more likely to regret the things we didn’t do and the opportunities we missed than the things we tried. Amazon’s Jeff Bezos calls those, “the things that haunt us.”
- B. And, we have more choices than we know:
1. We do not control everything. In fact, so much of what I have that is good was a gift.
 - a) Joshua actually makes a similar point at the end of this book. He notes that God has given them the land already ready to live in.
 - b) I did not earn being born in the US as opposed to North Korea. I didn’t
 - c) Much of what I think I choose was given.
- C. But we control more than we think.
1. You can decide to act, or you can decide not to act. Both decisions are choices, and both carry risk.
 2. Let me say it to you straight out: God expects us to cross your Jordan. You can choose to stay on the banks of the Jordan. But that is a bad plan.
 3. You can give in to fear, but that is a bad plan. Take that step.