

GETTING TO THE PROMISED LAND

As we celebrate these thirty-five years as pastor of Christchurch Baptist Fellowship, I would like for us to study how Israel entered the Promised Land. The Promised Land has sometimes been referred to as heaven, yet most students of the Word of God see Canaan or the Promised Land as the type of the fully surrendered Christian life. This must be right, because heaven will be a place where struggles are ended and as the old spiritual says, "I ain't going to study war no more," however, Canaan still has battles to be fought and won. Alan Redpath called the Promised Land, "The Victorious Christian Life." The Promised Land is a place where we are assured victory even as we battle on.

Entering Canaan is a good place to meditate on today, because in many ways, it is where I see Christchurch at this hour. At Jordan's brink we see where we have been and now we see where we are going.

I. When God moves, we move.

Joshua 3:1-7. Joshua 3:3, "And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it." Earlier Moses wisely would not have moved an inch without knowing God was leading, "And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15).

The biggest trouble the Israelites got into was when they failed to follow God at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 32:6-12). There is no substitute for following God. What does it mean to follow God?

A. Following God means instant obedience.

Notice these words in Joshua 3:3, "When ye see...remove...and go after it." God is not looking for excuses, He is looking for obedience (Luke 9:57-62). He doesn't want hesitation as seen in Matthew 21:28-31. Wonderful things wait for those who live obedient lives (Joshua 3:4).

B. Following God means give God space.

Joshua 3:4a, "Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it...." They were instructed to keep a full 2,000 cubits or, in our measurements, about half a mile between themselves and the ark of the covenant, which represented the presence of God. Why this space?

1. To show respect unto the Lord.

Sometimes our approach to God can be too casual. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."

2. To get a clear view of the direction God is leading. Joshua 3:4b: "...that ye may know the way by which ye must go...."

C. Following God means going where you've never gone before.

Joshua 3:4c: "...for ye have not passed this way heretofore." The Lord delights in leading us in the adventure of faith. He wants us to step out by faith without all the evidence brought forth. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

II. Have confidence that God will never fail us.

Joshua 3:8-17, Joshua 3:10a, "And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you...." How do we know God will never fail us?

A. Because He is with you.

"...the living God is among you..." (Joshua 3:10a).

B. Because He is true.

"...the Lord of all the earth..." (Joshua 3:11b). God is not the God for only a select few to worship and any other culture is free to choose their own gods (Joshua 4:24). Titus 1:2 reads, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." Jeremiah 10:10 dogmatically states: "But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation." I Thessalonians 1:9: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Acts 17:30: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."

C. Because of what we have seen Him do.

Joshua 3:13-16, "That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho" (Joshua 3:16). Normally the Jordan was about 30 or 40 yards wide and about 6 feet deep. But during this time of the year at harvest, the Jordan swelled to a mile wide. Zaretan was 30 miles upstream. What a swath the Lord cut to make a way for His people to pass! The waters were turbulent from the melting snows of Mount Hermon. Jordan means

“wide-judgment.” The Israelites had no boats to paddle or ability to swim these rough waters for a mile. It was a miracle. Contrast this miracle with the demise as seen in Judges 2:10-12.

III. Never forget what God has done for us.

Joshua 4. One man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel was chosen. Each of the men hoisted a huge stone to their shoulder and they constructed one stone memorial at Gilgal, on the western side of the River Jordan. Another stone monument was placed in the riverbed. How then shall we never forget?

A. By reminding our children (Joshua 4:8, 20). “Gilgal” means “a rolling.” The reproach of Egypt is now officially wiped away. The children need to know their roots so that they too may live in overcoming victory by bolstering their faith.

B. By reminding ourselves (Joshua 4:9). Why is the other memorial in the riverbed? Why allow the river water to come over the memorial? I submit to you that this is done to remind the children of Israel that what God has done for them is unique. God is the never changing God, but the way He deals with us is unique in every generation and every person. Once we are through with this life, the book is closed on us. God has no clones. All of God’s children are very special to Him. And all His dealings are sacred.

In Conclusion:

Joshua 3:4b, “...For ye have not passed this way heretofore.” Emerson said, “What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside of you.” Therefore (1) Take the risk of faith. To borrow the words of the famed hockey player, Wayne Gretzky, “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” (2) Do your best. “Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do” - John R. Wooden. (3) Go the extra mile. “There are no traffic jams along the extra mile” - Roger Staubach.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.