

“STEP INTO THE WATER”

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Text: Joshua 3:1-17 NLT

God’s Word: Joshua 1:1-9 NLT

QUESTION: What does an airplane, bicycle and a church have in common?

ANSWER: If either stops moving forward, you’re in trouble!

Anyone that has driven up a snowy or icy hill knows that you are all right as long as you keep moving forward, but once you stop you are in trouble. Likewise, the church must keep moving forward. It does so by: following the Lord, following in faith, following in obedience, and expecting the miraculous. We have to be those who step into the water!

As long as the church follows God’s leading it will be successful. The first thing we must do is... follow the Lord. Look at Joshua. From the very first verse of this chapter, we see the heart of Joshua. Joshua had a heart that was passionate in following the Lord. Remember, it was Joshua that God told to... *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* When God told Joshua to move he did. Joshua was obedient to God.

Verse one tells us *“Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing.”* This verse shows that Joshua acted immediately upon the return of the spies. When God opened the opportunity, Joshua acted.

Some people, when God tells them to do something, respond by saying “Well...I guess I’ll have to pray about it.” If God has spoken to your heart the praying has already been done. When God tells you to move, you don’t ask questions, you just do it.

Another thing that we should notice about verse one is the phrase “crossing over.” Some variation of the word appears 4 times in this chapter. In this case it is a reference to the Israelites making the crossing possible. In order for God to get them across the Jordan they had to go to the edge of the river. Basically, if you want to walk on water you have to get out of the boat!

However, we see something even more important in verse 3, where it says: *“When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.”* The ark was precious to the Israelites for two reasons. First because it contained the two tablets of the law. More importantly, it represented to them the presence of Yahweh Himself. In essence, following the ark was the same as following God.

How many would agree that it is easier to move if you know God is leading the way? This is indicated in the next verse, where it says *“Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you”.*

We are not always sure which way to go, but with God leading the way we can move with confidence. Because we know that God has promised never to leave us or forsake us.

The Australian coat of arms pictures two creatures--the emu, a flightless bird, and the kangaroo. The animals were chosen because they share a characteristic that appealed to the Australian citizens. Both the emu and kangaroo can move only forward, not back. The emu's three-toed foot causes it to fall if it tries to go backwards, and the kangaroo is prevented from moving in reverse by its large tail. Those who truly choose to follow Jesus become like the emu and kangaroo, moving only forward, never back.

When God tells us to move we have a choice. We can move forward and be blessed, or we can stay where we are and become stagnant. Our response when God tells us to move ought to be: Yes, Lord! Lead the way, Lord! Where ever you lead, I will follow! We have to follow without hesitation, without reservation and without question. If God tells us to move, we must go. If God tells us to jump, we ask how high? If God tells us to run, we ask how far?

We can do this if we follow in faith. Before the people could move forward with God they had to "consecrate" or purify themselves. The people were to be holy because God is holy, the ark was holy, and the event itself was holy. If we are going to move forward with God we must be as He is—holy. 1 Peter 1:16 tells us to "be holy, because I am holy." To "consecrate" or purify yourself refers to putting themselves in a holy mindset—washing their clothes, fasting from activity that would distract and fully allowing themselves to focus on the calling at hand. If they were going to follow God then they had to make themselves focused and ready for the mission.

The reason for the consecrating themselves was because *"tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."* God was going to do things that would absolutely amaze them. If we step out in faith, God will do things that are beyond our imagination. Ephesians 3:20 tells us that *"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think."* Our God has the power over all things, and He is able to do immeasurably more than we can even imagine. But we must be willing to step out in faith to see it.

Then Joshua tells the priests to *"Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river."* This was a tremendous step of faith on their part. Although they were used to carrying the ark, this is the first time that it was leading the way. Up until now the Ark was in the midst of the people, but now it was at the head of the line. Notice also that they did it with no hesitation or question.

However, the real step of faith is what they are asked to do next. Joshua is to tell them that *"When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there."* In verse 15 it tells us that the river was at flood stage and its banks would have been overflowing. So what's the big deal about that? The word "Jordan" means, "to descend," and many believe the reason for the name is because its banks were anywhere from twelve to fourteen feet high. So for them to step into the water was literally a step of faith. In order to see the power of God they had to step off the bank and into the water. Stepping out in faith!

Charles Swindoll in his book Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back tells the story of a farmer who wanted to impress his hunting buddies. To impress them, he bought the smartest, most expensive hunting dog he could find. He trained this dog to do things no other dog on earth could do-- impossible feats that would surely amaze anyone. Then he invited the neighbors to go duck hunting with him. After a long patient wait in the boat a group of ducks flew over and the hunters were able to make a few hits. Several ducks fell in the water. "Go get 'em!" shouted the proud owner to his magnificent dog. The dog leaped out of the boat, walked on the water, and picked up a bird and returned to the boat. As soon as he dropped the duck in the boat he trotted off across the water again and grabbed another duck and brought it back to the boat. The owner beamed with pride as his wonderful dog walked across the water and retrieved each of the birds one by one. Unable to resist the opportunity to brag a bit he asked his fellow hunters, "Do you notice anything unusual about my dog?" One of them rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Yes," he finally said. "Come to think of it, I do! That silly dog doesn't know how to swim does he??"

One thing we know for sure, if we are going to follow God it is going to take faith. God is going to ask us to do things that to us seem difficult if not impossible. God is going to ask us to go where we cannot see. God is going to take us places we have never been. God is going to ask us do things we do not know how to do.

Unless we are willing to step out in faith we will never accomplish what God wants us to do or go where God wants us to go or see what God wants us to see.

If we step out in faith we are going to see the improbable become do-able, the impractical become possible, and the impossible become reality. If we step out in faith we will see the power of God.

However, to step out in faith we must follow in obedience. As soon as Joshua tells the Israelites "*Come and listen to what the Lord your God says.*" We understand that he wants to make clear to them that what he is about to tell them are not his words or commands, but they are God's. He wanted to make sure that they knew that this was not his plan but God's. I've found that it is hard to argue with "thus says the Lord!"

He goes on to tell them that "*Today you will know that the living God is among you...*" I am sure that there must have been some apprehension in their minds about how do-able this was going to be. Whenever God asks us to step out in faith we can be assured that He will be there with us every step along the way. It doesn't matter who opposes us as long as God is leading the way. Romans 8:31 tells us that "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*"

He says "*Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River!*" If God is in it, we cannot lose. If God is in it, we cannot fail. If God is in it, we will succeed.

As a sign that they believed God, they are to "*choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. The priests who carry the Ark of the LORD--the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.*" The significance of this is that it is a reference to the covenant promise to Abraham and his

descendants. God is going to keep His promise completely. No tribe of Israel is going to be left out. But in order to realize His promise we have to obey.

Charles Finney noted this about obedience and sacrifice, "Revival is nothing more or less than a new obedience to God!"

1 Sam. 15:22 tells us that *"to obey is better than sacrifice."* Someone once said "God said it; I believe it; that settles it." Well I think we need to change it to "God said it; that settles it."

If we want to walk in God's blessings and provision then we have to walk in obedience to His word. If we want to see His power manifested in our lives we have to be willing to do what He tells us, when He tells us.

If we follow Him in faith and obedience then we can expect the miraculous. Look what happens when God's people step out in faith and obedience. The text says *"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 above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry."* We have already noted that the Jordan was at flood stage. Yet as soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the water upstream just stopped!

Now where we live in Ohio, there are a lot of streams and creeks. Now most of the year they are just easy going streams and creeks. Except in the fall and spring when we have had a lot of rain; then they just flow and can sometimes overflow their banks to the point that it's dangerous. But this is at a time of the year when the Jordan is flooded at its worst, and the water just stops. Coincidence? No...miraculous!

Not only did the water stop, but it says *"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."* Now I don't know about you, but after a river has been at flood stage and the water just stops flowing, I would expect the river bed to be a mud pit. But here it says it was dry! I don't know why it was dry; I don't know how God did it; I just know that it was dry. When God does the miraculous nothing is forgotten—no detail forgotten. He not only stopped the water, but He dried up the river bed so the people could cross.

When we do what God says, and follow Him without question we can expect the miraculous. If we step out in faith and obedience, why should we be surprised when God does miracles?

Step out in expectant faith and our God will deliver! We have a big God; expect big things!

We, as the church, must follow the Lord. We have to follow in faith. We have to follow in obedience, and expect the miraculous!

Oh, come on preacher, God doesn't do miracles any more does He? Yes He does! How about you? Do you want to move forward with God? Do you want to see the miraculous? Are you willing to step out in faith and obedience? What swollen river is God calling you to cross? Step into the water!