

God's Wondrous Works

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] Well, please do turn to your Bibles and to Joshua chapter 3, which you'll find on page 179 in the Church Bibles.

So we're continuing our studies in Joshua, and this is our third evening in the book. And we're looking at chapters 3 and 4 this evening, so we'll begin at chapter 3, verse 1, through to the very beginning of chapter 5.

So Joshua chapter 3. Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and they set out from Shittim.

And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of three days, the officers went through the camp and commanded the people.

As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length.

[1 : 17] Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before. Then Joshua said to the people, Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.

And Joshua said to the priests, Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people. So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. The Lord said to Joshua, Today I will begin to exhort you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan. And Joshua said to the people of Israel, Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.

And Joshua said, Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man.

[2 : 42] And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.

So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water, now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest.

The waters coming down from above stood, and rose up in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zeratham. And those flowing down towards the sea of the Araba, the salt sea, were completely cut off.

And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan. And all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, Take twelve men from the people, from each man a tribe, and command them, saying, Take twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you lodged tonight.

[4 : 17] Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up, each of you, a stone upon his shoulders, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you.

When your children ask in time to come, what do these stones mean to you? Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever. And the people of Israel did, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the Lord had told Joshua.

And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood.

And they are there to this day. For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.

[5 : 41] The people passed over in haste. And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the Lord and the priests passed over before the people.

The sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over, armed, before the people of Israel, as Moses told them. About forty thousand ready for war passed over before the Lord for battle to the plains of Jericho.

On that day, the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel. And they stood in awe of him, just as they had stood in awe of Moses all the days of his life.

And the Lord said to Joshua, Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come out, out of the Jordan. So Joshua commanded the priests, come up out of the Jordan.

And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

[6 : 49] The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. And they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

And he said to the people of Israel, When your children ask you, when your children ask their fathers in times to come, what do these stones mean?

Then you shall let your children know, Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over.

So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever. As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west and all the kings of Canaanites who were by the sea heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.

Well, may God bless to us the reading of his words. Please do have Joshua chapter 3 there open in front of you as we spend a few moments in this passage together.

[8 : 26] Now this is a passage all about the almighty God of heaven and earth performing wonders for his people as they stood on the brink of the land.

And he did it not only to get them into the land to get them across the river that he promised them but he did it so that they and all the world would know something of him.

It's quite easy to read a passage like this and to really feel the distance. This astonishing account of the river Jordan standing up in a heap and stopping flowing that sort of thing happened to people a long time ago in lands far away.

It's quite hard to connect in some ways. We might find it fascinating. It's a gripping story and we might well think that the events recorded here would make for a cracking movie. Indeed they would.

But it's easy I think to distance ourselves because it is a miraculous event. It defies belief. The river Jordan suddenly drying up to allow an entire army to cross at just the right moment.

[9 : 44] It stretches our credulity. But this event is part of our history. As the seed of Abraham as the true people of God this is part of your history.

Our God really did this for our ancestors. He acted in astonishing almighty supernatural ways for us people as they stood on the brink of the promised land.

As they stood on the brink of conquest. And he acted in this way not just to get them over the obvious obstacle of the river Jordan but also to reveal things about himself so that his people indeed the whole world might know certain things about him.

You get that short verb scattered throughout this whole passage. God is doing all this so that his people might know. They might know something about him.

Just have a look down with me chapter 3 verse 4. If you look at the second half do not come near the ark in order that you may know the way you shall go.

[10 : 52] Look on to verse 7. Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel that they may know that as I was with Moses so I'll be with you. Look down to verse 10.

Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you. Verse 22 of chapter 4. Then you shall let your children know Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.

Verse 24 So that all the people of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty and that you may fear the Lord your God forever. God did this so that people would know something about him.

What were they to know about him? What was it that God was revealing about himself in these mighty acts? Well two key points and then an implication flowing from it.

So first we see God's trustworthy promises. Second we see God's tremendous power. And third we see God's provision for the training of progeny.

[12 : 02] I was really searching for a word beginning with P. And you can see Willie's influence on me. I never heard the word progeny before I came here so there we are. God's provision for the training of progeny.

So let's first look at his trustworthy promises. God does exactly what he says he will do. So trust his words. It is clear throughout this whole account that it is God who does this astonishing miracle.

But more specifically it is God's gospel word that is at the very heart of all that happens. It is that which leads his people into the land of promise. It's impossible to miss the absolute centrality of the ark of the covenant in all that happens here.

Look down with me you see the ark front and center verse 3 verse 4 verse 6 this is chapter 3 verse 11 and you can keep going.

I started counting the number of times that the ark of the covenant was referred to here and I stopped counting at 14 it's really right in the center of all that happens great prominence is given to the ark because it is unmistakably the ark that is giving the lead it is the ark that is going to show the people where to go they were to follow it verses 3 and 4 they were to follow it it was the ark that was going to be first into the Jordan and the last out but what are the significance of the ark why is it given such a place of prominence here in this story we know that it's important for Israel but why such centrality well the ark very presence of God mediated through his word right there in the midst of his people that is what the ark contained it contained the very words of the living

[14 : 06] God ten words in fact the words of the covenant of the Ten commandments that were inscribed on the table of stone and carried by the ark it was the ark that the people were to follow and they were told to keep a good distance from it so that they might see the way to go this was new ground for them they had never got this far before they were entering new territory literally and so they were to stand back so they could see the ark in the distance and know where to go it was God's word that was to be at the center it was God's word they were to follow it and the people obey the ark of the covenant was to be at the very center and it was it was the first into the water and the last out and Joshua is one of the few places in the Bible where we see

Israel being so careful to obey just as the Lord commanded and he gives great success to Joshua and the people because they stood firm in his word they obeyed the confidence that the Lord's word was solid and reliable they were confident that the Lord's word would do its work that was the only way they were going to be able to cross the Jordan only by following his word only by careful obedience would they enter the land now on one level that's easy to say but it's hard in reality imagine those priests who were there carrying the ark imagine them as they approach the river Jordan you can also imagine one of them saying to the others we're just to keep walking here we've got to walk into the river and stand still that's right yes comes the answer that's what we're to do let's keep going not an easy thing to do it requires trust trusting what

God has said is true and will come to pass only by trusting God's word would they make it across the river that is always the way that God leads his people by his word now we no longer have a literal ark of the covenant but we do have his eternal word of the covenant his unchanging gospel the unchanging gospel of grace written down for us in the scriptures we are led by his gospel his gospel word alone and so having it central to all that we do having it dictate our priorities our planning that is the only way that we are going to be led to be seek to fulfill that which Christ has called us to which in the big picture is the abiding call to proclaim to the nations the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ now on a local level we are in the midst of gospel planting in

Kelvin Grove and shortly in Queens Park it is that same gospel that is to lead us wherever we are whether that's here in Bath Street or further west or to the south it is that same gospel that we are to proclaim and although his word in the gospel seems like foolishness it looks foolish to the world it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe and our task is to communicate that message to communicate it to real people and that is often not the most exciting thing is it it's often invisible work it doesn't produce nice graphs which you can plot progress on it's not within our gift to guarantee gospel growth here or Kelvin Grove or Queens Park tempting as it might be we're not to jump on whatever church growth bandwagon seems to be rolling on the trendy blogs but we are to continue to proclaim the same old message just in more venues with more opportunities we plant and

God gives the growth so let's keep our heads down and press on with that let us resolve to commit to following and proclaiming the word as revealed in the scriptures that is our unchanging priority it's that same word that is to dictate how we live how we operate and here in Joshua God's word is absolutely central his word is trustworthy and his people keep it central they obey just as he says God's word is trustworthy God does exactly what he says he will do so trust his word well there's our first point secondly we see God's tremendous power God is mighty in astounding supernatural power so fear him God works supernaturally God works supernaturally as this account makes clear this is no run of the mill ordinary sort of event this is astonishing it is unique and the writer makes that crystal clear to us as he draws our attention to the time of year and the conditions of the river this is no babbling brook look to verse 15 of chapter 3 you get this little comment in the brackets he says the

[20 : 11] Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest now it's estimated that at that point where Israel crossed the Jordan it would have been between 8 and 12 feet deep and in flood up to a mile wide potentially the river had burst its banks it was probably the worst time of the year to cross the river the town that I grew up in as a youngster had a flood plain which is rather unusual because most of them have been built on but maybe once every other year that would flood and the river that was maybe 30 feet across would stretch out to maybe half a mile uncrossable there's no way you're going to get across that flood plain unless you've got a boat now imagine the Jordan here in full flood for an army of several thousand people plus women and children and provisions an utter impossibility there's no way they're getting across that river it is clear that this is the work of

God alone the river is at its widest and deepest and most difficult to cross and in selecting this moment to cross the river the Lord is demonstrating that it is he alone that will do this he alone is doing this and the people of Israel surely knew that as they approached the Jordan they surely knew that they were not going to cross this under their own steam it had to be the Lord who would get them across and with the promises of chapter one ringing chapter two fresh in the memory they stepped forward in utter dependence upon him and confident knowing that his promises are sure they had seen God work wonders before and he was going to do it again but they were totally dependent upon him maybe the Lord sometimes brings us to that point where we just know that it's just going to be impossible on our own and we simply have to depend on him

God sometimes humbles us to the point of dependence surely Israel was humbled to that point as they looked at this huge river thousands and thousands of them looking how are we going to get across it was the Lord's work Israel knew that on their own they had no chance but the Lord's purpose was not simply to get the army across the river and into the promised land it was much more than that the crossing of the Jordan happened so that Israel indeed the whole world would know something of the Lord of the heavens and earth this astonishing miracle was an act of revelation the Lord did it so that Israel would know chapter 3 verse 10 that the living God was among them God did it so that all the peoples of the earth may know chapter 4 verse 24 that the hand of the Lord is mighty and that you Israel may fear the Lord your God forever now imagine witnessing this event standing on the eastern bank of the river gazing across into the promised land looking over the raging torrent of the

Jordan watching the priests carry the ark into the river and then to watch the river stopping flowing being able to walk over on dry land stepping foot onto the land promised years ago and looking over your shoulders the ark is lifted up out of the river and see the Jordan come flooding back down now witnessing that you would have been in no doubt whatsoever that this was a wondrous act of the hand of the sovereign lord who else could do that you would have been no doubt whatsoever that the living god was among you you would have been no doubt whatsoever that the lord who did this was the lord of all the heaven and earth and that he was to be feared and obeyed it could not have been clearer that this was the work of god alone they contributed nothing to this now what steel that would have put in their backs as they now faced the inevitable battles that were to come the god who did that is with us and he will without fail drive out from before us the

Canaanites the Hittites all the other nations the lord who had brought them into the land in that astonishing and almighty way would surely give it to them what steel that would have put in the backs of future generations that would read this account in years to come this is our God truly he is with us he truly lives among us even when the seemingly impossible was to be faced they were to depend on him because he was their God he was the sovereign God he stopped the Jordan that is your God what steel that would have put in their backs but how much more for our generation how much more steel that put in your back not only do we look back to these same events the God who did that is our God he is unchanging but we look back to even greater events than these we look back on the greatest and most wondrous act of mighty power there has ever been in the resurrection of the

[26 : 16] Lord Jesus Christ we know that the Lord is sovereign over all even death he has won the ultimate victory a victory to which we contributed nothing at all which God alone did for us and truly he dwells among his people today by his spirit he promises never to leave you nor forsake you in his letter to the Ephesians Paul prays for his readers that they might know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the work of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead that same power is at work in you what comfort and assurance that brings to you not just in an ultimate sense but in the daily troubles and battles that we face if our father in heaven has done that if he has raised

Christ from the dead how surely can we trust him for the daily battles the daily struggles the routine crisis that we all face at one point or another those rivers that just seem impossible to cross if our God has done that what assurance that brings if he has done that great work of salvation which is surely a reminder that we are to depend on him for everything then how much more must we learn to depend on him when we face this seemingly impossible the downright difficult the drudgery of life we can trust him perhaps you're going through a time like that right now you can't seem to see beyond the current crisis a recent bereavement pressure is on from every side you just can't seem to catch a break well the

God who stopped the Jordan the God who raised Christ from the dead he is your Lord and he promises you that he will never leave nor forsake you the God to work supernaturally is at work in you with his spirit now what great comfort that is for us in our creatureliness with all our limitations with all the hardship we face our God is the living God and he dwells among his people this passage is a reminder of God's tremendous power his supernatural power it is a reminder that he alone is sovereign that we can trust him we can depend on him in everything our

God is mighty in supernatural power and he the God who mightily handles great emergencies great moments like this on the brink of the promised land he is surely adequate for all the emergencies and crisis that we will face individually or as a congregation you can trust him our God works supernaturally and he dwells among his people that is a great encouragement isn't it God's tremendous power well thirdly then training progeny God provides a means for remembrance so that future generations might know they are rescued by God's grace this astonishing parting of the Jordan was not just a moment of revelation for the people who witnessed it and heard about it at the time this was to be an ongoing revelation for future generations too

God provides a means of remembrance so that his people wouldn't forget his great and mighty acts of liberation and that they would instruct future generations in the acts and purposes of God this sort of miracle this stopping the Jordan was not going to be a weekly sort of event the Red Sea was a generation ago and never again was God going to act in quite that way again parting a river or a sea in fact this crossing of the Jordan brings to partial completion something started decades before the writer is careful to record the exact date of the crossing chapter 4 verse 19 he says the people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month that is exactly forty years to the day from the

[31 : 32] Passover in Egypt and Dale Ralph Davis in his commentary says that we might therefore say that this day had marked the beginning of redemption now it's marked by its completion they were now in the land promised Israel once a slave is now an heir in the promised land this is a great moment in the history of God's people in the story of his great rescue and liberation it was a day to be remembered and so the Lord provides a means of remembrance with the twelve stones set up as a memorial forever for the people of Israel stones that were to stand as witness to God's amazing act of drying up the Jordan an act that he did verse 24 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty and that you Israel may fear the Lord your God forever God gives them a visual reminder presumably because men are so prone to forget but more especially so that the current generation will instruct the next one that's the thrust isn't it twice you have the refrain when your children ask in times to come what do these stones mean you get in verse 6 and again in verse 21 the stones were to be a memorial a visual reminder a teaching aid to train future generations in the great rescue acts of

God they were to teach their children what God had done at the Jordan our God stopped the river and they were teaching the implications of that the trustworthiness of God's word his tremendous power he rescued us once slaves now heirs and we have been given our own signs which stand as witness which proclaim to us today the mighty acts of God supremely in the life death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ we have his word that testifies to God's works we have two visible signs two remembrances which take us to the very heart of our faith baptism and communion these are the visible signs that God gives to us the visible signs and seal of the gospel that we are to make use of and they help us not only to remember but to feel sure that the gospel is true visible signs that point us and future generations to the grace of

God in the gospel and so we are to treat those sacraments the baptism and communion with seriousness and thoughtfulness not to be treated as some sort of religious ritual but as a visible word that brings us the gospel it brings it to life in solid and concrete ways before us we see the gospel do we make use of that or do we treat it as some ritual are we prepared to explain what that means to others to our children are we training future generations in the truth are we teaching them of God's great act of rescue his great liberation from slavery to air are we training future generations in that truth if you're a parent here this evening are you teaching your children about the gospel of the

Lord Jesus Christ it begins at home it's your responsibility now of course that's supplemented by Sunday school camps activate TY but primarily it is the job of a parent but more widely are we taking this responsibility to train the next generation seriously as a church many youngsters in and about the church whether Sunday school Bible class whatever it might be many of them come from families where there is no Christian parents or maybe just one are you able to help particularly men are you able to train to provide a godly witness to the younger men in the church to the teenagers in need of a strong Christian male example to follow what can you do it doesn't need to be through formal ministry you can have them over for a day with your own children take them to one of the many crispy creams that have emerged in recent weeks all across

Glasgow now of course you do that in moderation you don't just give them a dozen but maybe you could organize a kick about a cinema trip turn to McDonald's junk food as a theme but I was a teenager once and it works wonders those informal moments that those sort of things afford those conversations for me as a teenager growing up those moments with older guys watching them as they lived godly lives listening to them articulate the fundamentals of the faith the fact they were interested in me that was huge for me that and the steadfast godliness and witness of my own father which I'll do well to emulate the present generation has a duty to teach the next are we training the next generation and what a great privilege that is we get to tell them about this god the god who stopped the jordan the god who works in supernatural ways to rescue people like you and me that is the god we get to share that is the god we get to teach the next generation about the god who promises never to leave nor forsake you god has acted mightily in history he has supernaturally rescued his people from death and slavery and brought them into his promised rest that is a sure thing he will see you safely to canaan side we know great things about god from this passage we know that we can trust his words it must remain central to all that we do as his people that is how god works through his word we know we can take great confidence in what god has supernaturally and powerfully done in the past and does now so that we can depend on him as we look to the future we know that god has acted mighty to rescue his people and so we all of us have a responsibility to teach and train the next generation the god of joshua chapter three and four is your god he does wonders and he never leaves nor forsakes his people let me pray here is how you shall know that the living god is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the canaanites lord what a god you are a god who does wonders for his people who mightily and powerfully rescues his people from death from slavery and will surely bring them will bring us safely to the rest that he has promised we thank you that that is the god who is our god might we fear you might we obey you might we depend on you and might we teach the next generation about you for you are wonderful and mighty and you never leave nor forsake your people help us to continue trusting you we ask it in

[40 : 37] jesus name amen