

“Leading & Following into Uncharted Waters” Joshua 3 Sunday 9AM

Many believers secretly wish that God was more committed to making things comfortable for them. A simple survey of Scripture reveals that God does not do comfort-zones. He is the comfort zone – we are to find our rest in Him. Yet, because God moves, we also have to move in response. There are occasions when God moves with significant shifts, changing everything around us. When God moves in a family, church, school, ministry or region, His people in those places must move with Him. This usually requires redeemed people who lead and those who follow. This message from the life of Joshua and ancient Israel equips to learn some things about how to respond when God takes us into and across uncharted waters. There are things God requires of leaders. There are separate things which God requires of followers.

I. When Followers Hear from The Leaders (1-5)

A. There is movement (1) – “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.”

B. There is intentional focus (2) - “At the end of three days the officers went through the camp 3 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. 4 Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.”

The people of Israel were still for three days, encamping at the mighty Jordan which was moving strongly in front of them during the season where it regularly overflowed its banks. As they watched the river for three full days, It is reasonable to assume that some experienced intimidation at just how in the world they were going to get across this impossible obstacle. Only a fraction of the people had been alive at the crossing of the Red Sea four decades prior. This was a brand-new experience and test of faith for them. All they had at this point was the voice of leaders instructing them to obediently follow the priests who carried the ark, and even that would be done at a distance. The context for the entire nation was that they were about to embark on something new. None of them had “passed this way before.” When they saw the presence of God, represented by the ark, begin to move upon the shoulders of the priests, they were to follow without hesitation.

C. There is a sobering expectation (5) – “Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”

Joshua is a type of Jesus Christ throughout most of the Book of Joshua, and even in other places in Scripture. As he stands before Israel, he speaks to them directly on behalf of God. His lone command is for them to get ready for the historically stunning work that God would accomplish the very next day. He spoke to them and charged them to get ready to experience wonders from God. In his call for them to consecrate themselves, he was commanding them to prepare themselves in heart, mind, body and strength. They were to take the initiative to get ready to enter into what the Lord was doing. There was no Plan B that was being offered to Israel.

II. When Leaders Hear from The Lord (6-8)

A. Stewarding the presence of God (6) - “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.”

B. A new move, but the same God (7) – “The Lord said to Joshua, “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 will be with you.”

C. Obeying God and serving the people (8) – “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.”

The leaders were called to the deliberate assignment of obeying the directions given to them from the Lord through Joshua. They were truly stewarding the presence of God in the ark in anticipation for the supernatural work God was to perform. Part of the call that God was giving the leaders was to consider the needs of the people to cross over the Jordan. They went before the people...and then waited. Their focus was not being wowed with the miracle. The purpose of God in the wonder of the parting of the Jordan River included the very practical aspect of bringing the masses into the inheritance of the Lord on the other side. The priests were to wait however long it took for every willing Israelite to cross over. Notice, they could not go as quickly as they could on their own. Their individual pace as leaders was regulated by God to allow the masses to cross. They would not

wait on the unwilling, but they stood still as the eager, obedient followers said Yes to what the Lord was doing.

III. When Followers Hear from The Lord

A. Heaven's perpetual beckoning (9) – “And Joshua said to the people of Israel, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.”

This is the invitation to all of us. God is inviting every one of His children to draw near and hear Him. He is not giving hundreds of different sets of conflicting instructions to his people. It is not that He wants you to draw near so you can hear something different that is uniquely for you and independent of what He is speaking to those whom you are traveling with. He just wants you to hear Him for yourself. He wants to talk with you. Jesus, His Son, is the only mediator between you and Him. He certainly raises up, authorizes and empowers human leaders, but that is never to replace the great privilege you have to communicate with Him. There is great reassurance and confidence that comes to our hearts when we hear God for ourselves. If leaders and followers are both submitted and humbly listening, they will hear the same language. While God may communicate in different modes with different people, He does not communicate conflicting messages. It is sometimes difficult to follow a human leader when you have not heard the Lord for yourself. If that leader has a testimony of honoring the Lord and rightly representing Him, then follow him or her as unto the Lord. Trust the Lord within the human leader. There will come a time when you will want to hear the voice of the Lord for yourself so deeply that it will become an unquenchable thirst. When that moment arrives, you will hear Him and renewed levels of confidence and faith will find you.

B. The momentary sign is connected to the greater promise (10) – “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.”

C. Presence, process and power from God (11-13) – “Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. 12 Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man.” 13 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.”

IV. What Happens When We All Obey What We Hear (14-17)

A. We move on from the familiar (14) - “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...”

B. We experience the power of God (15) “...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 Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho.”

They had been experiencing His presence at the banks of the Jordan. They had experienced instruction and submission. They had experienced consecration. But they had not experienced power until all the leaders and all the followers stepped out in simultaneous obedience.

C. We step into the place of God’s promise (17) - “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.”

11:15AM Notes Below

“The Uncomfortable Grip of Grace” Genesis 15:1-19 Sunday 11:15 AM

Most of the time when we sing about God’s grace, think about God’s grace or speak to others about God’s grace, we primarily focus on the comforting

aspect of it all. Grace feels cushiony to us - a soft pillow in a hard life. Yet, grace also brings about something that is anything but comfortable. Grace hits its fullest level when we are completely tapped out of our own resources. When God wants us to experience a deepening confidence that His grace alone is sufficient, He leads us to places where we cannot lean on anything, and I mean anything, within ourselves. We give up control, we wrestle with doubts, we become impatient, we struggle to continue. This is the low place in life where grace flows down. Through one chapter in the life of Abraham, here called Abram, we encounter what it means to have to remain in the uncomfortable grip of grace. The process is demanding, but the results are breathtaking.

I. Abraham Was Struggling, so God Was Straightforward (1-6)

A. God facilitates a conflict (1) - “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

For the second time, God comes to Abram and begins a dialogue about His pledge to bless Abram greatly. Abram would be given countless descendants and a massive inheritance of land from God. Somewhere between 10-12 years earlier, God had originally specified this promise to Abram who was 75 years old at the time. That alone would have stretched Abram’s faith, but now another decade had passed and there was still no child. God seems to almost casually approach Abram to reiterate His intentions to abundantly bless him as he originally committed.

B. Abram discloses his doubts (2-3) - “But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”

Abraham had just won impressive military battles. He honored God by refusing human reward from those whom he helped. Abram was patiently waited on God’s promise to come to pass. Perhaps when God used the word “reward” in verse 1, it triggered something in Abram which prompted Abram to speak about his inward struggle in waiting upon the Lord to come through. God had intentionally honed-in on the fear in Abram’s life by speaking boldly about a reward and breakthrough that still had not arrived. God is coming to him to deliver him from his doubts about his lack of an heir. Remember, Abram had no child in the present moment, so there was zero visible evidence that god would do what He promised. In fact, it was harder to believe

in Genesis 15 than it originally was in Genesis 12. Abram informs God what God had not provided in the past when He reminds God that he did not have a single descendant yet. Abram then says, likely in a mixture of fear and frustration, that one of his servants was going to end up inheriting everything Abram had. He speaks a false prediction over his future. God would now clarify things for Abram who was struggling to rest in the uncomfortable grip of God's grace.

C. God speaks corrective clarity (4) - “And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”

Abram had forecasted his feelings about his future in the ears of God, based on his present lack of an heir, and his history of God not yet providing in this area. He informed God that the future would hold all of his inheritance going to a man who was not from his own DNA. God tells Abram that **his vision for his future was wrong**. He boldly declares that Eliezer would not be Abram's heir. God would keep his promise and Abram would have MANY descendants. God brought both correction and clarification to Abram. We must learn not to speak doom over our own destinies. Delays do not equal denials. God will often make us wait for the promise to come to pass. He does this in order to increase our value for what He has promised, and also to purify us from impatience and doubts. Doubts must be brought to the surface in order to be slain. Delays accomplish this in us. On a side note: poor Eliezer the servant! God would promote someone who was not even born yet to be above him. If Eliezer assumed that he would be Abram's eventual heir, he learned later that God had a different plan in mind for Abram. Eliezer would be well taken of, but he would not be Abram's heir. We are reminded here that God reserves the right to violate our assumptions and to choose someone instead of us. Kill envy here. You are not diminished in Christ when another is promoted above you in the natural realm. Be content with what you have and rejoice in the promotions of others. Eliezer the servant must eventually give way to Isaac the son.

D. God stretches Abram without apology (5-6) - “And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6 And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

This is a personal visitation from God to Abram. The passage states that God took Abram outside, so God had been meeting inside of Abram's tent with him. How glorious of God to draw near after our exhausting battles and growing doubts. God asks Abram to look up at the sky. He then uses the stars as his illustration of how many descendants He would give to him. Interestingly, Abram was unable to see the stars because the sun had not

yet set (see vs. 12). The stars were there, but Abram could not see them until the proper time came. Similarly, Abram's descendants were promised, but Abram could not see them until God's appointed time. Sometimes God has to tell you what He already told you. Sometimes God wants you to see clearly by faith those things which you cannot see at all in the natural. This is how God stretches Abram (and us) in our trust-muscle. It is in this context that we find the primary human component for the New Covenant: faith in God is the foundation for receiving justification. We trust God, and God calls us righteous before Him. This is grace!

II. Abraham Was Clueless, but God Had A Plan (7-11)

A. Promises apart from proof (7-8) - "And He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

As Abram struggled over the lack of an heir, he also struggled over the means by which God's promise of the land might be actualized. Abram was old – how would he come to possess the land promised to him? God lets Abram know that he had not forgotten his previous steps of faith of leaving the land of his people. Abram had obeyed by faith and entered into a nomadic lifestyle when he was around seventy years old. Here he was more than fifteen years later, still without the land promised to him. Abram openly and humbly admits that he just cannot understand how God is going to give him the land. He asks what many of us ask when we are brought forced to live in the uncomfortable grip of grace. The land was FULL of enemies and warriors who dominated the area. They were in power. They were in control. In the natural, Abram could not defeat them so as to claim the land. Abram asks God how He would be able to fulfill His promise. He just could not see it for himself.

B. Instructions without explanations (9-10) - "He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half."

As a response to Abram's question, God moves to strengthen his faith through visible means. God calls up Abram to prepare animals in sacrifice so that God could ratify the covenant with him. The promises from God seemed implausible, so Abram had asked for help to believe God. He was asking God for assistance in convincing

him. Though what follows is foreign to most believers in the West, this type of sacrifice was common in Abram's day. As he slew the animals, Abram would have known exactly what the Lord was doing. God would seal the covenant after Abram prepared the sacrifice.

C. Obedience coupled with exertion (11) - "And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away."

Cutting apart of the animals and dividing them in half indicates that Abram was believing as he obeyed God. Significantly, Abram had to protect what he was offering. The birds seeking to devour the sacrificial carcasses typify the desire of the enemy to steal away what we lay before the Lord. What was happening between Abram and God was immeasurably significant to both Abram and all his future descendants. The birds coming in to steal it was a real threat. The bible reveals that Abram fought hard to protect the sacrificial offering of his obedience. We do not need to only offer up what is required, we need to guard what we release so that Satan does not steal our offerings to God. The enemy wants to rob you of your participation in what God has ordained for you. He wants to steal your worship, your offering, your life of sacrifice to the Lord. He knows that your obedience and honor of the Lord will not only bless you, but also all your descendants after you if they follow your ways of trust, worship and obedience. Like the birds to Abram, the devil seeks to swoop in and devour your sacrifice. Like Abram, we must not cease to resist the devil until he flees from us.

III. Abraham Was Asleep, but God was Active (12-21)

A. God requires no assistance (12) - "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him."

How humbling to think that one of the most important covenants that God ever made with humans was ratified while the recipient was in a God-induced coma. This is akin to what God's grace often looks like. We cannot see what is happening and we are not in control of what is happening. God must bring us often to this place. We are not usually comfortable being in this position. Grace often comes when our abilities, thoughts and experience is wholly insufficient to accomplish what God has decreed. God will be ratifying the Abrahamic covenant without Abram's help.

B. God releases fuller explanation (13-16) - "Then the Lord said to Abram, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a

land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

Notice that the fuller, specific answers only came to Abram after it is declared that he had become fully trusting in the plans of God (verse 6). So it is with us most of the time: **we gain more precise understanding of how God is working on our behalf only through exercising faith, through disciplined waiting, and through continually releasing ourselves to rest in God’s uncomfortable grace.** For Abram, God tied together the two main promises which comprise the covenant - the offspring and the land. Abram was struggling with having no indicators that God’s promises to him would come to pass. He could see no heir, and he had no information about he would ever possess Canaan’s land. God had said that Abram would indeed have innumerable descendants, and it would be those very descendants who would inherit the land promised to Abram. Abraham thought that God was running out of time to bring the promises to pass. God let Abram know that the plan which was in His heart was much more vast than Abram could know. It involved multiple generations in multiple locations. God was going to multiply Abram’s descendants in Egypt and then they would come back as one people to displace all the inhabitants of Canaan’s land. God also reaffirmed to Abram that there would be specific blessing to him as a man, but that the fulness of the covenant would belong to his descendants (none of whom were in existence at the time of the promise). We do well to remember that God’s promises to us are not to end with us. A blessing *to you* from God is meant to become a blessing *through you* to others. Abram longed for a single son and a place to call his own. God wanted a nation of His own that would bring Him glory. The land would belong to Abram’s people forever. To affect this result, God had a plan that will only come through grace.

C. God enacts both sides of the covenant (17-21) - “When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

Finally, God here ratifies the covenant to Abram with His own supernatural presence. Both the firepot and the flaming torch are visible manifestations of God's presence and plan. The **fire pot** represents that aspect of God which holds or keeps. God was able to contain the substance of the covenant within Himself. The smoke coming out of the fire pot signifies that there was something going on inside of it - it was a boiling covenant. The **flaming torch** represents that aspect of God's working which illuminates. God was able to impart understanding in all that He ordained for Abram. So, God passed through the flayed pieces of the animals to certify the covenant. God was bringing light and heat to the promises to Abram, even though there were ten people groups whom God mentions were all presently in control of the land. Abram was a speck of dust among those enemies in the natural. But God was not intimidated. He lists the people groups as already being judicially evicted from the land which now was being deeded to Abram via the covenant. Abram had learned the importance in remaining in the uncomfortable grip of grace. He learned that he was not in control. He learned that God was fully in control. He learned that this was the most secured place for him to be.

In closing, here is what we have learned:

God deepens our rest in His grace through

- 1. Intentional delays in what He decrees.**
- 2. Calling us to fully commit to what we cannot fully see.**
- 3. By making the promise to us more prominent in our thinking than the obstacles in front of us.**
- 4. By taking away our power so we do not have any further option of trusting in ourselves.**