



CROSSING THE JORDAN

Today the Israelites are crossing the Jordan – so let's dive straight in (pardon the pun) ...

Joshua 3-4

What would you like to see this church become? What would God like to see it become? I'm not asking for a prophetic utterance necessarily (though you never know what God might do). Just use your imagination a bit.

Now, what might stand in the way of that? Between MFC and its future? Between us and that future (as we are involved)? It might be fear, tradition, discouragement, rebellion, pride, confusion, doubt, lack of faith in God.

What are the issues for MFC? For me?

For you?

The fact is: whenever God calls His people to step out in faith, there are obstacles to overcome. For the Israelites, their first obstacle was the River Jordan. The Jordan is usually about 100 feet wide; but in the springtime, when it's in flood, it can be anything up to a mile. You ever faced a situation and felt like it was a flooded river? "I can't do this; I can't go any further; this thing is too big for me," etc. We've all been there, right?

How then did the Israelites overcome their Jordan? How can we?

There are 4 clues here:

1) Pursue the presence of God. Joshua tells the Israelites to follow the Ark of the Covenant, the crate containing the stone tablets, albeit from a safe distance.

The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned 16 times in chs3-4. In the book of Exodus, it's referred to as 'God's throne.' And in the Psalms, there are references to God sitting 'between the cherubim', the angelic beings moulded out of the lid. I.e. the ark is a picture of God's holy presence. So, as they follow the ark into the Jordan, it's as if they are following the very presence of God Himself. And they needed to, because as it says here, they hadn't been 'this way' before. They had no idea where they were going! You ever felt like that? That's OK: you don't have to know. The important thing is to know the one who does! The closer we stick to God – the more we follow in His footsteps – the more obvious that path will become.

Strategies are good – Joshua and Acts have plenty of 'em – but to live our lives mindful of the presence of God? That's what counts.

We need to keep our eyes on Him!

2) Perform the precepts of God. The Israelites are given 2 commands here: wash yourselves and follow the ark into the Jordan. I.e. say 'no' to the things God says 'no' to, and 'yes' to the things God says 'yes' to!

So, the Israelites wash themselves, follow the ark into the river, and the waters part. What's the point? There is blessing and victory to be found in obedience. This is important, because it can be easy to fall into a mindset that says, "All I have to do is believe in Jesus, and that's it." Which is kind of true, but it all depends on what you mean by 'believe.' In the Bible, believing is usually an active thing – God has things to ask of us, too. He calls us to live for Him; He calls us to serve. As James 2 puts it, "Faith without deeds is Dead." If we're going to see God do something, we need to make ourselves available to Him. We need to be willing to get our feet wet.

Notice, too, that the Israelites are told to follow the ark, but not too closely. I.e. they are to respect the holiness of God. Yes, God is our friend. But we need to understand He's Almighty, not All-matey!

And it needs to show.

3) Proclaim the promises of God. Joshua reminds the people of Israel of what God has done for them, and what He promised their ancestors, all the way back to Abraham. He also commands them to take 12 stones or *evenim* from the riverbed and place them on the bank, as a reminder to their children or *benim* of what God is doing now; as an encouragement for the future.

Following Jesus tends to be quite future-focused – but to get it right, we need to look back. And there are some things that are worth looking back to: memories of how God was there for His people; memories of how He was there for us; of promises He has made.

That's why it's important to read the Bible regularly – it's a reminder to us. But it's also why it's important to be here, to remind ourselves – and each other – of the promises of God. As it says in Hebrews 10: "Let us not give up

meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another ...”

I.e. community matters. Amongst other things, it’s the chance to lay some stones; to jog some memories.

4) Proceed in the power of God. The priests step in; the waters part; the people cross. If you listen to some Christians, you get the impression that Jesus has saved us: next stop, heaven! And they miss the fact that He has also recruited us into His army, to advance His kingdom. But not in our own power. As Deuteronomy 6:23 puts it: “He brought us out ... that He might bring us in.”

Did you spot it? “That *He* might bring us in.” I.e. sheer willpower is not enough; sheer strength of character is not enough. We can want that river to part all we like, but we need God to act, to clear the way for us, to lead us through.

To put it another way: how is this town, this nation, this world, ever going to change? Only by the power of God. How is this relative or friend ever going to become a Christian? Only by the power of God. How am I going to be a more effective witness to the people I share my life with? Only by the power of God.

Is that what we’re praying for?

Stamp On That Map

Many a conquest has involved crossing a river. When Alexander the Great was camped along the western banks of the Euphrates, he and his generals looked at a map of the world they knew. No Hellenistic army had ever gone further than the Euphrates, so when Alexander proposed crossing it, they were terrified: “We can’t do it; we’ve never gone this far before; we don’t know what we might face”, etc. Alexander threw the map on the floor, stamped on it with his foot, and said, “We’re crossing that river.” And they conquered the Persian Empire.

If we are to leave a ‘spiritual footprint’ in this world, we need to step into uncharted territory. It might be signing up to help with this activity or that. It might be talking to friends about church – or even inviting them to it! It might be learning to share your story / His story in 3 minutes. It might simply be praying for your non-Christian contacts.

The point is: we all need to stamp on a map, in some way.

What maps do you need to stamp on, today?