

Juniper Green Parish Church
Sunday 16th October 2016:
The Power of God - Joshua 4: 14 to 24

Reading: Joshua 4: 14 to 24

¹⁴ That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶ ‘Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan.’

¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, ‘Come up out of the Jordan.’

¹⁸ And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran in flood as before.

¹⁹ On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰ And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. ²¹ He said to the Israelites, ‘In the future when your descendants ask their parents, “What do these stones mean?” ²² tell them, “Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.” ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea ²⁴ when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the

peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.

Sermon:

Along with our hopes and joys there are always problems in life for which we simply have neither the mental strength nor the wisdom to meet the challenge. We need spiritual strength from God.

Our challenges in life can only be met if we rely upon the Lord's strength and this is what Israelites were learning when they crossed the River Jordan into Canaan.

For believers today, crossing the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian commitment to another.

It is when we finally realise that all problems and all challenges need to be met with the Lord's help on an everyday basis that we sense God's power and strength.

For the Israelites, Canaan was hardly heaven - think of all the battles that they had over the subsequent couple of hundred years until King David and King Solomon established a period of peace and the golden age of Israel!

Aside from the miraculous way the river was crossed, one of the most important features of our reading is the Ark of the Covenant. Its prominence is mentioned nine times in Chapter 3 and seven times in Chapter 4.

What is so important about the Ark?

It represented the power and promises of God.

As the people of Israel set out to cross the Jordan, invade, and possess the land, they must do so **not in their own strength**, but in God's strength - it was God Himself who went before them as represented by the Ark of the Covenant that would give them victory.

And likewise today we too should depend on God's power and promises.....take everything to the Lord God in prayer and use His strength to get you through the anxieties and challenges you face each day.

In verse 5, Joshua commands the people to consecrate themselves but what does the word "consecrate" mean?

This is not what would have been expected from a military leader like Joshua by his people.

But God's ways are not our ways.

For God's people, spiritual preparation is the vital element for being in the right relationship with God that brings the power of God into our work and ministries..... yes even us, living in Edinburgh in 21st Century and yes even us, the worshippers at Juniper Green

"Consecrate" here means set yourselves apart, prepare yourselves."

In the Old Testament this word is often used in connection with confession or cleansing – it underlines the need to deal with sin in one's life.

Joshua says in verse 3:5, "for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

When there is a lack of consecration through confession of sin, we hinder the power of God. But there is even more included in this call for consecration.

"The people of Israel were to expect God to work a miracle.

Joshua shows us today how preparation and dedication are so important; namely, it reminds us of God's holiness, and it shows the necessity of sacrifice for sin or the cross of Christ.

To experience God's power, protection, and deliverance, we need to prepare our hearts and deal with the sin in our lives through confession.

To be effective, leaders need to have the right credentials, namely, solid biblical understanding and a life of prayer.

And that is what God did here with Joshua (Ch 3 Verse 7) and hence Joshua became the great leader recorded in our reading today.

Since it was the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant (Ch3 Verse 8), and because the Ark represented God's power, they alone were to take the Ark to the edge of the water and stand still in the water.

What do we understand from this? It reminds us of our part in the plan of God.

We must learn to step out in faith and obedience in our everyday lives to God

It reminds us of the need to trust in God's promises

The authority of leaders among God's people needs to be Scripture based rather than through their personality or whatever happens to appeal to people. (Chap 3, verses 9-13)

It is God's presence as the one and only living God that sustains believers regardless of what life might bring. The key is staying focused on His presence and relying upon Him.

After breaking camp, the priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, led the way and walked to the Jordan which was swollen over its banks. This must have been frightening due to the fast flowing river, but they trusted in Joshua and God, and when they stepped into the waters, a miracle occurred immediately.

The river-bed was dried up, allowing the thousands of people with their animals and baggage to hurry across (Ch. 4, verse 10).

How could this miracle event occur?

- (1) The event came to pass as predicted (3:13, 15).
- (2) The timing was exact (v. 15).
- (3) The event took place when the river was at flood stage - it was spring time – the river water was running high
- (4) The wall of water was held in place for many hours (v. 16).
- (5) The soft, wet river bottom became dry at once (v. 17).
- (6) The water returned immediately as soon as the people had crossed over and the priests came up out of the river (4:18).

God was magnified, Joshua was exalted (3:5), the people were surely energized and motivated, and the Canaanites were scared.

Crossing the Jordan meant two things for Israel.

First, they must be totally committed to going against armies, and fortified cities, and secondly, if they were to be successful, they must also be committed to faith in God, the only true and living God.

As I stated earlier, for believers today, crossing the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another.

This should mean the end of a life lived by our own personal efforts, and the beginning of a life of faith and obedience to God.

And then in Chapter 4 we come to the memorial made from the 12 stones.....

Joshua said..... In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?" Tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord (Ch 4 verse 7)

And can you see how God works through these events where he demonstrated his amazing power.....we are still remembering this remarkable miracle of over 3200 years ago.

The memorial stones were to promote encouragement and reverence in all Israel and for all time.

Every time the Israelites returned to Gilgal where the stones were placed they would see the circles of stones and remember what God had done for the Israelites to cross the River Jordan into the “promised” land.

The very site of the stones was a reminder of the sovereign power of the Lord over nations so they might remain faithful to the plan of God.

But we too forget the Lord God from time to time through our preoccupation of the wrong priorities we have in our daily lives.

By way of reflection on these Chapters 3 and 4, here are 2 tasks we are called upon to do today that form memorials of the saving grace of God and our calling as believers in Christ?

- (1) Worshipping together at our weekly services and other special services at time of Christian festivals.
- (2) By daily personal devotions in reading the Bible, and through individual prayer or through pastoral or house groups.

For believers today, crossing the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another.

The people of Israel set out to cross the Jordan, invade, and possess the land, but they did not do so not in their own strength, but through God’s power for it was God Himself who was going before them.

To conclude, our lesson for today is not to try to do things in our own strength, but to pray to God in all situations and through all worries and challenges that we all face.

And we do that by praying together, loving one another, and helping one another through all the challenges that life present to us.

We can do that in the certain knowledge that if we seek God’s forgiveness for our failures....for our sin....then we will receive that forgiveness and love.

We can therefore look forward to the joy of eternal life because of the power and grace of God that was so clearly demonstrated when Joshua crossed the River Jordan. Amen (1424 words)

Martin Pearce
Church of Scotland Reader
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email: martin.j.pearce@blueyonder.co.uk