

Joshua 3

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Joshua chapter 3. Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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 two thousand 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. 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 exalt 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's 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 12 men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the souls 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 from as far as Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water, now that 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 Arba and 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. I'd like to welcome you today to Christ Church Chicago, and Sister Reed, so grateful for your ministry among us today. And the opening line of that song you gave us, we are here in his presence. To be here in his presence. It must be taken by faith that if we have gathered here, we would find ourselves in God's presence. For indeed, many of us awaken every morning with the question, how do I get home from here? I want to title this talk, Getting Home From Here.

[4 : 0 5] And I want to raise a question that I believe our text resolves. It's a question that we ask in many different contexts every day. How do I get from where I am to where I want to be?

How do I get from living in the presence of this world to dwelling in the very presence of God by faith? You ask the question on the great matters of life, but we will ask it even later today in the smallest of things. How many of us will open our phone at some point today and punch in the answer to our question, how do I get from my present location to my preferred destination?

And your phone will tell you. Some of you have come to the city of Chicago to prepare for a life work. You're continually asking the question, how do I move from my chosen field of study to a settled lifelong vocation?

Others, in the midst of life's transitions, either having been laid off or preferring something else, are asking, what do I need to do in this job that will prepare me for the job I want?

Think of it in the home. How would I raise my children now so that they would love the Lord later? Or, to a much larger scale, how do I get from this life to the better life to come?

[5 : 41] How do I deal with ruptured personal relationships? How does one restore a sense of well-being?

How do I get from my terrible marriage to the one that I would take delight in? How do I get home from here? On the grandest of scales, how would my soul, which often feels I'm in the presence of the wilderness, how will I exist in the place of shalom and rest?

How do we get home from here? I believe it's a question that our text resolves.

It's a question that it intended, actually, to answer. Put your eyes, if I could show this to you, on the opening and closing of the chapter.

The opening verse, we find Joshua rising early in the morning, verse 1, and setting out from Shittim. Shittim was roughly 10 miles to the east of the Jordan River.

[7 : 02] It's the city that they were lodging at, even in chapter 2, verse 1, before they did their reconnaissance mission of what was taking place in Jericho. So he's now rising from 10 miles east of the Jordan, and they came to the Jordan, all of Israel, he and all the people of Israel, and they lodged there, here's the phrase, before passing over.

The writer wants you to know that the setting of his story on how do you get from here to there begins with all the people now pressing in on the edge of the Jordan.

Look at the last verse. Verse 17. Now the priest 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.

The story that we're reading today is bracketed by the people before passing over and now having passed over.

They got home from here, and it's a magnificent story because the promise put forward in the scriptures had gone back over four centuries to one named Abraham who had set out on his own wandering wilderness years under the belief that God had promised not only to make of him a great nation, but to provide for him a great land through which by faith his own people would become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

[8 : 47] Over four centuries before, we've been waiting for this promise to be fulfilled. The promise was reiterated to Isaac and to Jacob and then to Moses himself, and at the age of 80, taking that church plant out of Egypt into wilderness 40 years.

And now our chapter, this chapter, the fulfillment of everything that had been promised all the way back from Genesis chapter 12. What a moment. We are expecting then to see how God fulfills his promise.

How does he get us home from here? Well, the story actually demonstrates the how through a succession of speeches.

I encourage you to have it open before you. There are going to be four speeches made that actually provide the answer of how God does it.

And each speech isn't simply a reiteration of what was said, as good storytellers know. The speeches build on one another.

[10 : 11] There's a perspective that is gained in each of them until the dramatic tension is finally put down. The first speech right there, verse 2, comes through the voice of the officers.

This is how. 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 the place and follow it.

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 sudden mention of the ark of the covenant of the Lord is unexpected. And yet it's the first thing here spoken of by the officers.

You get from here to there as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord being carried before you and you follow it. And then he goes on to say, at some distance.

[11 : 23] Don't run up onto it. Lest you end up with a skyline like Manhattan, where it is difficult to see where you are from wherever you're standing, but rather a city like Chicago that has given distance to all that is around so that you can actually make out that which is rising before you.

And so the ark was to go out in front that all might see it and follow it together. This ark is a very interesting and provocative element in the text.

We haven't read about this ark at all yet in this book. In fact, you can read the first five books of the Old Testament, and this ark has not really made an appearance since the very early days of Moses when it became both a point of contention among the nations who were wondering about the power of God, and it became something that the people of God were actually frightened of given its permanence and its power.

We haven't seen the ark at all, and now it takes primary position. You'd have to reach all the way back to Exodus 25 to find God rolling out his architectural drawings for the tabernacle and for how he would dwell among his people to even see what this ark was doing, or Exodus 35 through 40, where you actually see the construction of it.

But the ark to this point has been known by the people of God, rarely seen by the people of God. In fact, it was supposed to be housed behind a curtain at which the high priest would only go in once a year to offer sacrifices before God.

[13 : 19] This hidden gem among God's people is now leading in answer to the question, how do you get there from here?

If you're not a reader of the Bible, I can help you this morning by letting you know that the ark of the covenant was a smallish box with gold-clasped rings that poles could be run through that six or seven individuals, priests normally, could carry.

And within the ark was the actual tablets of the word of God. The word of God was going before the people. On top of the ark, gold-plated, a mercy seat, probably visual even to their eye now, a blood-stained mercy seat.

For not only does the ark represent the presence of God in the world, the ark represented a place of substitutionary provision for God's people as they walked through the world.

This ark then, with golden cherubim on either end, wings outstretched over the mercy seat, was that which now the people saw. They were there to follow it.

[14 : 36] It held God's word. Christ Church Chicago, you are the next generation.

The church planting generation has largely now moved away or died off, or if not, those of us who remain soon will.

But to you, we announce your way forward. to ever find your gaze upon God's revelation of himself as known through his word and follow it.

The word of God is a lamp unto your feet. You have a terrible marriage? Word of God. Have a ruptured relationship?

Word of God. Need direction for your vocational calling? Word of God. Look to raise your children in a way that you can survive from 4.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

[15 : 54] on any given day? Word of God. We read it every week publicly. We stand for it.

But I wonder, Monday through Saturday, do you live on it? Do you?

Or is this the 30-minute window in which you are absorbed in it? Is this the one moment in the week where our congregation stands in a way in which everyone can see and the word is proclaimed, is that it for you?

Or are there moments daily of opening it, praying over it, and asking God to guide you in your way?

Well, the officers aren't the only speech that is given.

[17 : 04] Their voice is not alone. They give way. Look at verses 5 and 6 to a second speech, this one by Joshua. How do we get home from here?

Not only through what the officers have said, but then Joshua said, verse 5, to all the people, consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.

And Joshua said to the priest, 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. You are to follow the ark, the presence of God.

It should always be within your sight, but notice the addition to the narrative is that it's the ark that is carried by the priests. The ark remains central, but new information is brought to it, which conjures up in our mind those Levitical priests who are wearing their holy garb, standing now with hands on poles, processing with the ark, carrying it even, the high priest most likely, even adorned in his hat and his breast place and his ephod and all of that splendor.

The presence of God through the word is joined through the priesthood of God and substitutionary atonement. And the vantage point of the reader has been shifted.

[18 : 40] For in the first speech, we are numbered among all the people, are we not? You could see the ark before you, but in this speech, the writer has directed your attention as though you were fixated as those who are the priests.

At one point, we saw the perspective of the entirety of the people, but here, through Joshua's speech, we set our eyes on the sightline of the priests. The ark not only is conjured up in our mind to hold God's word, the ark is also now the mercy seat.

It is the place where substitutionary atonement is made. That's how you get through.

Could this be informative then for how you get anywhere from here? We're normally men and women and children who chart our own path. how do I get there from here?

Some of us go right to the GPS. Others of us, sadly, say, I don't need it. And then you get lost along the way. And the person sitting next to you says, why didn't you just put it in the GPS?

[20 : 02] Well, because I thought I knew where I was going. you need the presence of God and the provision of God to go anywhere in this life.

Some of us go, well, how am I going to get to my place of settled vocation in the midst of my early years of studies? And so you chart out your path.

But have you put God between your settled destination and your present studies? If not, then you are simply taking up your own journey toward your own ends and I guarantee you there will be byways along the way where God will arrest you so that he might have you.

Look at me again, he says. have a ruptured relationship?

Know how you're going to get through? Not going to do it without forgiveness? Not going to do it without grace? Not going to do it without blood?

[21 : 25] Not going to do it without the word? Not going to happen. You need, I need God to get us from here to there.

Do not make your life journey that of your own making. Do not chart your own course. A fool does such things. Well, behind the words of the officers and behind the sound of Joshua's voice is the third speech.

And notice it comes in verse seven and it belongs to the Lord. The Lord now speaks concerning how we get home from here.

And it's the most extensive speech. It runs all the way through verse 13. I know Joshua is speaking in the midst of it, but he is speaking that which the Lord revealed to him.

So the Lord's speech now says and adds to the story. How do God's people get fulfillment on God's promises?

[22 : 36] Well, the people are following the ark. But they're not merely following the ark. They're following the ark that is carried by priests.

And notice the nature of how the ark is described here. It's fascinating. You ought to put your eyes on it twice. Verse 11. Behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth.

Verse 13. The priests are bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. Fascinating expansion of the ark. Now, by the end of God's speech, the ark has been referenced ten times.

And this one, most expansively, it isn't just the ark of the covenant of the Lord for Israel. When God speaks, he wants you to know that as Israel goes over, I am the Lord of the covenant for all the earth.

But centuries from now, men and women and children will gather in the city of Chicago, and I can do for them what I did for my own. Amen. I can get you where you need to go because I am the Lord of all the earth.

[23 : 55] Twice he wants you to know that. You and I enter into the text through the little phrase, of all the earth, God can get you home from here. Have cancer today and wonder if you're on your way out before the year's over?

God can get you home from here as you take the promise of his word, the provision of his son, and you follow in his ways from wilderness to rest.

What a wonderful speech this is. What's interesting though, and the added detail that you get here isn't just the number of times that the ark is being central to the answer of the question.

The ark is what resolves your way forward in life. What's interesting here, what God wants you to know is the very beginning, verse 7, the Lord said to Joshua, today, I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all of Israel.

Now, this is a fascinating detail that we have not known yet to this point. It's going to be the ark and the people following the ark. It's going to be the ark carried by the priest.

[25 : 03] It's going to be the ark which exalts God's specially chosen son. Joshua, how is God going to provide rest for his people?

It's going to be through his presence, his provision for sin in ways that exalt his savior leader. The way God does that in Israel here is interesting.

We're going to see it soon. The waters dry up. They all go across and they all look back at Joshua and they just go, you're the man, Joshua. You're it.

But as the story unfolds, there's a prophetic, ironic twist in the way the Bible presents God's salvation.

David will succeed Joshua as the chosen savior king, king, but he will effectually bring about God's reign, not through this great sign of victory, but through his own sufferings.

[26 : 26] In fact, there will be prophetic words that the servant who actually gets us home from here could be called little more than a suffering servant.

take a look at Psalm 69 penned by David at a much later date who demonstrates the ironic way in which the Bible tells its own story.

We would expect David to be exalted in even greater ways than Joshua. But look at how Psalm 69 begins. Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me. The sufferings of God's saving king.

Verse 14 and 15. Deliver me from the sinking in the mire. See, no hard ground. He's now sinking in it.

[27 : 29] Let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Let not the flood sweep over me or the deep swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. And then later in the Bible story, Jesus will himself on the cross quote from this psalm.

He will take this psalm unto himself, demonstrating that the way home from here is not through God's saving acts of power that overcome death, but by one who will be God's provision for sin and take death upon himself.

This is the way the Bible is ironically told. As he quotes this psalm on the cross, he takes it unto himself, and at that moment, the writers, the narrators of that generation, say that that's when a curtain was torn, opening up, in a sense, visual lines to the ark of the covenant, wherein we find the presence of God, the provision for sin, and access into his very way forward.

This is what the Bible will say, that people will then stand at a distance and look at him. How do you move forward in life?

By looking at a distance with the cross of Christ, the means by which you pass over.

[29 : 15] No other way. No other way. And so I ask you, are you looking to Jesus to answer or resolve the questions of your journey?

Have you ever looked to Jesus? If you haven't, may today be the day that you stand at a distance of the Bible story and point to him, and say, you are my Savior and my Lord.

I don't know where I'm going in life. I don't know what I'm supposed to do with my life. I don't know how to restore what I've ruptured in life. I don't know how to get shalom or rest in life.

But according to the word I heard preached at this church on this morning, I am looking to you, Jesus, to both save me and direct me, to relate to me and restore me, to take me in matters of simple, ordinary, day-by-day life, and in matters of life and death, to take one who abuses the substances of life, alcohol and drugs, to actually say, no, this is a wrong arc to follow.

I'm going to give my life to Christ that I might actually become a new person. I'm going to give my marriage to Christ. I'm going to give my church to Christ. I'm going to give my friendships to Christ.

[31 : 01] I'm going to give my vocation to Christ. I don't want to go anywhere if he's not the means by which I'm going. it will be especially important come death.

There's a day on our horizon. John Bunyan put it well in Pilgrim's Progress on getting home from here.

The last part of Christian's journey was his need to traverse the Jordan River before he could enter into the gates.

He arrives at that river and his soul is anxious. Anxious fears need to be subsided when upon his own walk the verge of Jordan stood.

Jordan Draw near then to God this morning. Mercy is found in Jesus. Wisdom is found in him.

[32 : 21] Direction is found in him. Your vocational calling is informed by him. your soul.

Find shalom in him. So much for the first three speakers. They now fall silent at the end of verse 13.

But having spoken, they have all centered their speech on the centrality of the ark as the means by which we pass over.

And we've seen it from the perspective of the people. We've seen it from the perspective of the priest. We've seen it from the perspective of heaven in which he makes his own chosen one preeminent.

And now the narrator saves for himself. The storyteller through his voice will show how we get home from here.

[33 : 18] Look at verse 14. It's obviously now the narrator's voice. He's the one speaking. He wants all the attention on his word. His story has been building. And he says, so when all the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priest bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, notice his nice pause as a storyteller, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and then were with rapt attention at his words around his dinner table, and the feet of the priest bearing the ark were dipped into the brink of the water, he's almost slowed everything down to where now you see the footfall of the priest hovering inches before the water, and you're waiting for the separation, and like a great storyteller, what does he do?

Well, now the Jordan, you know, overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. See, he's building to his climactic moment, you're on the edge of the seat, and then he actually enlarges it even more before he says, verse 16, the waters coming down from above stood, one, and rose up, two, in a heap, three, from very far away, from 19 miles to the north, something they wouldn't have even known had others not told them of the story later, all the way down miles to the Dead Sea, and the people, he says, verse 16, passed over, by following the ark that is carried by priests, which exalts

God's Son, we see a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit done. In fact, the New Testament in the book of Acts will actually refer to this event as orchestrated by the power of the Spirit.

Think of now how you get home from here. You have the Father who's made his promise in the exaltation of his Son, born by the ministry of the Spirit, and in Father, Son, and Spirit we get home.

It's beautiful. That's what goes before us. that's what will save your life. That's what will sustain your marriage.

[36 : 17] That which will solve your substance abuse problem. That which will help you raise your children. That which will help you move from job to job or no job at all.

That which will be your soul's rest when sickness comes. That which will comfort you when those whom you love go on before you.

That which will sustain you as you return to other parts of the world to minister in Christ's name. That which will inform you as you now speak to your neighbor.

That which will lead you before bed to open his word and to close your day in prayer. prayer. It's the gospel that gets us home.

So be warned. Don't put anything else out front. I want you to see this.

[37 : 23] You know, the New Testament only refers to this chapter once with any definitive clarity. It's in Acts 7. Can you turn there?

Acts is way toward the back of the Bible. Stephen is now the voice. He's preaching. His congregation is not ready to receive Jesus as the resolution to their life questions.

In fact, they've rejected him. And in verse 45, he hints at our text. Our fathers, in turn, brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations.

The it there is the Ark of the Covenant. When Stephen preached his final sermon, he thought of our chapter.

Not in terms of the resolution, it would gladly bring to his listener, but by way of warning, because his congregation would not have it.

[38 : 36] Oh, don't miss this. Even look at what he has said earlier in verses 42 and 43. Stephen has called upon the Old Testament and the prophets and said, did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices during the 40 years in the wilderness?

Look what he accuses them of. You took up the tent of Molech and the star of your God Repon and the images that you made to worship. You took up the wrong thing and you rejected that which God brought over.

And so I say to myself and to you, I say to us as a new generation, be warned, put anything other than Christ, between you and your desired destination, and you will receive the very word of Stephen who says, verse 51, you stiff necked people, uncircumcised and hardened ears, always resisting the Holy Spirit as your fathers did.

And yet, as he goes out under that last word and is stoned, it will say that he cast his eyes to heaven and the heavens opened and he saw the Lord there to greet him.

And John in his apocalypse will say that at the very end, when Christ comes, the heavens will be opened and the language in Revelation 11 is not obtuse.

[40 : 17] He says he saw the ark of the covenant, none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Hey, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, how are you going to get home from here?

Joshua 3, I'm following the ark who is my Lord.

Won't you come with me? Our heavenly father, we are all asking the question every day, all of us in need of direction and guidance for the way.

Lead us in this wilderness world. Help us to take the hand of Jesus. Help us to be here in his presence.

Save us, strengthen us, impart wisdom to us and grant peace to each one in Jesus' name.

[41 : 39] Amen.