

Faith at the Rivers Edge

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[0:00] We're going to see how this goes this morning. I have the clicker, which could be a dangerous thing.

! The people of Israel as compared to how God leads us today.

Now, Marcy and I had this discussion of how would you like it if you were alive during the time that Israel wandered in the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years?

Would you like that or would you rather be alive today? Now I'm an adventurous sort. I'm the baby of the family, so rules generally don't apply to me.

My wife is the firstborn in her family and she wrote all the rules that apply to me as well as to anyone else.

[1:26] So as you might be able to guess, Marcy chose living today because she's alive today. I on the other hand said, you know, it would really be interesting to have been alive during the time that Israel was wandering in the wilderness.

Now, we could look several different ways at Joshua. We could go a really deep dive into Joshua and that deep dive would really be a comparative study of how Joshua is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

Joshua means Jesus saves. That's what Joshua's name means. And the experience of Israel crossing the Jordan is a spiritual look at what Christ went through when he died on the cross. We're not going to take that look. I think that that would be a great Wednesday night Bible study topic. Frank, I might take that one on later this summer.

It's a worthwhile study. Also, I think we have to look at the real differences between what the nation of Israel experienced in their wilderness experience and what we currently have living today.

[3:05] Israel had a leader, a leader that talked and communed directly with God. Moses had many occasions where he met with the Lord.

In Exodus, when he was given the Ten Commandments, he went on Mount Sinai. He came back. His face was glowing because he was in direct communication with God.

We have the completed scriptures. They were involved in literally writing scriptures.

So the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses. And then Joshua is the sixth book written by Joshua. We have the completed scripture, God, the whole counsel of God that we can look at. They had God's presence with them. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

[4:12] Christ in his earthly ministry said that he had to leave in order for the Holy Spirit to come and indwell each and every one of us. And then we have, best of all, we have the finished work of Christ on the cross.

So to compare what Israel had in Joshua that we're going to look at today versus what we have, well, I think the choice is quite simple.

It's far better for us to be alive now. But the things that they went through in some way, I say, that would have been exciting to be with them.

Israel, this is a little background, and we're going to get into the book of Joshua here pretty quick. But Israel has wandered in Sinai.

And I say wandered. They didn't wander. They were led every step of the way. They had been in Sinai for 40 years since they refused the first time to enter Sinai.

[5:20] They sent out spies. Ten came back and said, oh, no, giants in the land. We can't go there. Two came back and said, we can do this. We can conquer the land.

And so they did not enter. And then God said, okay, for 40 years you're going to wander. Basically, until this generation has passed away, you are going to have to wander.

He did continue to lead them and provide for them the entire way through that desert experience.

And what they witnessed, this is why I would want to be with them during that time. This is just some of the things that Israel experienced or witnessed while they were in wandering or being led by God.

The first one was the parting of the Red Sea. When they left Egypt, they immediately came to the Red Sea. God parted that. They crossed on dry ground. The waters closed up over Pharaoh's men. [6:27] And they all died. They had water that was too bitter to drink. God performed a miracle, actually, through Moses and made the water sweet to drink.

Another time, they had no water available at all. Rocks. That was it. God commanded Moses, strike the rock. He did.

Water came out of the rock. Manna from heaven. They needed food to eat. And so he provided food for them.

He gave them a pillar of cloud or fire to lead and direct them. And it was more than just a pillar of fire that they looked at.

It actually rose above the tent of meeting, which indicated it's time for you to move. And so it would move and they would follow that.

[7:25] Their clothing, their footwear, for 40 years did not wear out. Now, I know in our house, that would cause a problem because fashions change in 40 years.

And so we want new clothing. But, in fairness, that's, I'm sorry, honey. I'll owe you some money when we get home. Yes. For 40 years, their clothing didn't wear out, even though they were walking over some very rugged terrain.

And last, God gave them victory in battle. They were successful. But even in spite of all those things, all those things, I would have loved to see those because those all took place in a 40-year span.

And there were many more. So God was very active in providing signs and wonders to them. And it was a great thing for them. And yet, Israel questioned God, questioned their leaders, and grumbled about it.

We're a lot like Israel. See, when things start going not well for us, when circumstances overwhelm us, we tend to lose our perspective on what God has done for us.

[8:52] In Philippians 4, verse 7, and a few weeks ago, I was able to preach here, and we looked at Philippians. Paul gives a whole litany of reasons why he would have opportunity to complain or not trust in God.

And yet, in everything, all that happened to him, he looked at as God personally leading him. And he says in 4, chapter 4, verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything. But in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ.

Paul had it right. Don't be anxious, but go to prayer. That's a really good example for us to follow.

I want to show you this map. Again, to give you perspective. This is Israel, roughly in this area.

[10:19] This is the Jordan River coming out of the Sea of Galilee to the north, and Mount Hermon, which is up in this area, is really where the river starts, flows down into Galilee.

Out of Galilee, the Jordan River flows down and into the Dead Sea. And we find the nation of Israel here, it says starting point as Shittim, on the plains of Moab.

That's where we find Israel right now in this story. So turn, if you will, to Joshua chapter 3, and we'll read together.

Again, let me back up. There's a couple of important points to keep in mind here. One, Moses has just died, and Joshua has been commissioned by God in his place.

So Joshua is now the new leader of Israel. And God gives him a couple commands that are helpful for our lesson today.

[11:36] In chapter 1, verse 3, it says, this is a command that God is giving Joshua, every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you just as I promised Moses.

And then the other thing that had happened is spies, two spies had just returned from a trip into Israel or Canaan, and they come back with a very positive report.

We should take the land. God's given it to us. They're afraid of us. So those two things are kind of overarching or instructional for the situation that we're going to enter.

So let's look again. Joshua chapter 3, we'll read verses 1 through 6, and then 14 through 17. Joshua chapter 3.

Then Joshua rose early in the morning and set out from Shittim, and they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.

[12:47] 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, 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. 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. And then skipping down to verse 14 through 17. 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 into 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.

[14:14] And those flowing down toward the Sea of Ereba, 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.

And it's pretty amazing, pretty amazing story. You'll notice that in that narrative, it talks about the River Jordan and the condition it was in.

It was flood stage. It was probably early spring. That's when the barley harvest, the flax harvest takes place in Israel. And it was at flood stage. Years ago, Marcy and I set out on a Sunday morning.

We skipped church, and we were going to go to Mount Rainier and have a picnic. And I had scouted out this place. I read about this tranquil, wonderful spot beside a stream on the flank of Mount Rainier.

[15:22] And so we packed up the kids. We packed up the food, and off we went. And we got to that place. And it was anything but a tranquil stream. It was raging.

You could hear in the water. The water is just rushing downhill. And you could hear in there rocks, boulders just crashing because of the power of the water.

It was not a tranquil, wonderful picnic for us. And I think that's the situation that Israel is in here, too. They're encamped alongside the Jordan River.

And certainly, they're looking at it going, there is no way in our power that we have the ability to cross that river. Israel was very used to following the pillar of cloud when it was time to move.

But now, in Joshua 3, you'll notice that Joshua says, as soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried, you shall set out.

[16:34] So instead of following the pillar, now they are to follow the ark of the covenant. And there was a difference.

And yet, the ark of the covenant represented the very presence of God. See, on the top of the ark of covenant was the mercy seat.

And every year, the high priest would offer sacrifice, sprinkle blood on the mercy seat for the atonement or forgiveness of sins. So it was something that Israel recognized and represented the very presence of God with them.

So they were to follow the presence of God and cross the Jordan River. There is also a similar thought that this could be Emmanuel, God with us, like we have today.

We have experienced the coming of Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:23 says, And all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, the prophet Isaiah.

[17:47] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us. We have, again, comparative study.

They had the mercy seat to follow. We have the birth of Christ and his life. But even better than that, we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

And so as we look at how Israel followed God and how we follow God, I want to draw a sharp contrast here. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7 says, Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you? Who you have from God?

You are not your own. You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We have that indwelling Holy Spirit within us if we are his children.

[18:50] The second thing that Israel was told was, Well, follow the Ark of the Covenant because it's going to cross the river, but stay back from it.

Don't draw near to it. Stay back. The reason for that? The reason was, it's 1,000 yards.

That's 2,000 cubits. A cubit is about 18 inches. Do not come near it in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.

They were to watch where God led them. From afar, but still watch. Also, we know that the children of Israel were commanded not to draw near to the Ark because it should only be carried or handled by the high priests, the Levitical priests.

And it was as a sense of honor and awe for God and his presence on that mercy seat. We, on the other hand, have a far different edict for us.

[20:09] Instead of standing off, we are told, draw close. In Hebrews chapter 10, a great passage talking about a high priest, and yet that high priest is Jesus Christ.

It says in Hebrews 10, 21 and 22, And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a heart full of assurance of faith that our hearts, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We're enjoined to draw close to God. In fact, so close to God that we can hear his very voice. John chapter 10, Christ is talking about himself as a shepherd.

And John 10, 4 says, When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Israel looked at the presence of God from a distance. We're enjoined to draw close to God and to listen to his voice.

[21:49] And we know his voice because we know what he says in his finished word. Quite a difference. Consecration.

Consecration. Consecration. Joshua went through the camp and he said to the people, Consecrate yourselves.

This is in chapter 3, verse 5. Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.

Consecration is a ritual, an act that was set up for Israel as a way of setting themselves apart, separate for God's use.

Consecrate yourselves.

[23:09] for them to do that prior to God doing the great miracle that he was going to do the next day. I would also say that they did not need to consecrate themselves in order for God to do the miracle. They needed to consecrate themselves so that they would be ready to see the miracle that God was going to provide for them. In the same way for us, we have skipped a slide and I don't know where that one went. Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 are very instructional for us today in terms of the idea of consecration. It says in Romans 12, 1 and 2, I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Paul is really talking about consecration and being ready to see God act and spending time intentionally preparing to do that. 2 Timothy 2 also follows that same theme and you don't need to turn there. I'll just read it. 2 Timothy 2 21. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel honorable for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. The idea again is intentionally setting our focus on the Lord so that we can follow him. The nation of Israel did that through a ceremonial washing and just a time apart.

We do it through the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice and spending time communing with God. Perhaps the most interesting part of this passage from 2 Timothy where he says, in verse 21, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. Paul earlier in Ephesians, the second chapter, verse 10 says that we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God planned in advance for us to do. So the whole idea of setting ourselves apart and being ready to be led of God to do the good works that he has prepared for us to do.

The last thing that happens with Israel is they have to step out in faith. Joshua has gone through the camp. He has given them instructions.

And he tells the priests to go out and enter the water, put your feet in the water and stop.

[26:55] And it wasn't until they did that, that the water actually stopped flowing and backed up. And they were able to proceed through on dry ground.

It's that step of faith where we prepare ourselves to be led of God, but eventually we have to step out in faith and give up all the machinations, all the ideas of how we can do it and let God follow through and take action.

And here in the Jordan, that's what happened. What's really exciting to me is the promises of God and how literal they are.

See, in Joshua 1, I read to you earlier, this was a commission of God to Joshua, verse 3, chapter 1. And then compare that with Joshua 3, verse 15.

[28:17] See, God promised them wherever they set their foot.

He had already given them that. And that is a direct answer to a promise of God. See, when God gives his promise, he is true to that promise.

In doing this, God confirmed who he was, creator and sustainer of all the earth. He made the water stop. He made them stand up. But those priests had to step out in faith.

For us, what is our admonition? Well, we are to walk by faith.

2 Corinthians 5, 7 says, For we walk by faith, not by sight. And also, we are led by the Holy Spirit.

[29:29] Romans 8, 14, for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. And then finally, Galatians 5, 25.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. See, our walk should be one led by God, where we focus on what God is doing and follow him, much as Israel did.

But we have to be prepared in order to do that. We have to have faith that he is going to be the one in control, not us.

And we have to step out in faith and do that. And we have to walk in step with the Spirit. The interesting part about that verse from Galatians is that follows a whole list of what are called the fruit of the Spirit.

See, if we are walking, if we are led by the Spirit, then these things should follow us. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[30:45] That's what it means to be led by God today. I am so glad that I am alive today, that I do have the full counsel of God in God's written word, and that his indwelling is leading me, is leading us to great things if we simply put our faith and trust in him.

I hope you find encouragement in that this week. Come back next week. We're going to hear about the rocky end to this part of the story next week.

We will also be celebrating communion together next week. So please join us.