

That they may know

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[0:00] Now, I wonder whether you've ever heard of the saying, if you fail to plan, you're planning to fail. You probably have, haven't you? Probably from your parents too, I suspect.

But it's a true saying, isn't it? Whether you're preparing for a job interview or a final exam or if you're like Victor or Helen planning their big wedding day, less than two months away, good planning increases your chance of success.

Some of you may have heard how there's been some criticism of the Australian team at the Rio Games, lack of medals and all that. But by contrast, Team GB, that's the team from Great Britain, were immensely successful.

They, I think, managed to get 27 gold medals, which is more than even China. And many people have put it down to good planning and preparation, which has been going on for years, having the right programs, proper funding, you know, nurturing the right kind of talent.

And so well-planned were they, that they even issued the same luggage to every athlete, which made good sense when they were arriving in Rio, but not so on their return at Heathrow.

[1:16] I wonder whether you saw that one. Still, the general point is that planning is a good thing. And this is true particularly for war. Strategy, logistics, physical and mental preparation, all essential if you want to defeat the enemy.

Which makes Joshua chapter 3 actually a very unusual chapter, because there is none of that in this chapter. Now, how is Israel going to defeat their enemies? What is God's plan?

We're not told, not in detail. Instead, what the people do is move close to the Jordan River, where they learn that they're about to cross over. Now, we learn later on in the chapter that this is actually not an easy feat, because the river was at peak flow at that time of year.

So how will they cross? Well, we're not told either. Not yet anyway. Instead, all the people are told after three days is that they are to follow the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, in case you're unaware, because you've never watched an Indiana Jones movie, this is sort of what the Ark looks like. It's a box, essentially, not a very large one.

[2:28] But they are to follow it, because it says in verse 4, then you will know which way to go, since you've never been this way before. But keep a distance of about 2,000 cubits, which, if you look at your footnotes, is about 900 meters between you and the Ark.

Do not go near it. Now, 900 meters is a long way, isn't it? It's actually about the distance from here to Westfield Shopping Town. Now, the reason for this, though, isn't what many of you might think. It's not because the Ark was holy and they had to stand back, because at 900 meters, that would have been overkill, I think. Instead, Joshua tells them in verse 5, consecrate yourself, for tomorrow the Lord will be doing amazing things among you.

Something amazing is about to happen, and when it does, it will involve the Ark. And so, in order for as many Israelites as possible to see it, and, you know, they've numbered the thousands now by the time they leave Egypt, it was best for everyone to actually stand back.

Don't crowd around, is, I think, what the point is, so that you'll block the view for others. But I wonder whether, as you've heard the passage read tonight, whether you picked up a recurring phrase in the two chapters tonight.

[3:45] Four times the phrase, that you may know, or that they may know, or variants of it appear. Hence the title of the talk tonight. So, the first instance is here in verse 4.

Then again in verse 7. Verse 10, the third time, and then finally in chapter 4 and verse 24. And I think verse 24 is actually the theological summary of the entire story.

What God is at pains then to point out is that He's doing amazing things so that Israel will know. He's not doing them for entertainment or to show off. This isn't a New Year's Eve, you know,

fireworks extravaganza.

No, rather He does this so that people can come to a saving knowledge of Him. So, what is it that God wants to be known? Well, let's take a closer look.

So, in verse 4, they ask to follow the ark so that they will know which way to go. Or, put another way, it's so that they'll know that God is leading them. Remember how God led them in the wilderness?

[4 : 47] Firstly, with the pillar of cloud and fire. Then later, it was the ark which God instructed to be built. And that was placed in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle.

All these signified the presence of God. And so, the instruction to follow the ark is actually a command to follow the Lord. And now, as we read on in Joshua, you know, we'll find that the ark is actually not present in all the battles in the later chapters.

But, its presence right here at the start of the conquest as they're about to enter the land is actually a powerful sign that God is very much leading them in every battle, into every battle.

It is by His powerful hand that the enemies are going to be conquered. Well, let's move on to verse 7 where we find the second instance of that phrase.

This time, however, God is only speaking to Joshua, saying in verse 7, Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel so that they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.

[5 : 55] Now, this is the same assurance that Joshua has already heard before. So, if you remember back in, two weeks ago in chapter 1 and verse 5, I've got the verse on the slide to remind ourselves.

God had promised in that verse, As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. But now here in this chapter, one more additional detail is revealed. The amazing things God does will have the effect of showing the people that Joshua is God's chosen leader.

And so they are to obey His leadership just as they did Moses. And if you read both this account and that of the Red Sea, the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14, what you'll find is that there's a lot of parallels between Joshua and Moses.

And these parallels are both deliberate and inescapable. In fact, we're even prompted to make that very comparison. So look, we're going to jump around a bit, sorry, but if you look at chapter 4 and verse 23, right at the end, see what it says there.

It says, the Lord did to the Jordan just what He had done to the Red Sea. We're being invited to draw that comparison. But there are some differences between then and now.

[7 : 05] So in Exodus, Moses had raised his staff and stretched out his hand to part the sea. Well, here, it's the feet of the priests as they step into the Jordan with the ark that parts the water.

And whereas the crossing of the Red Sea delivered Israel from Pharaoh, the enemy, never to see him again, now they're crossing the Jordan to meet and conquer their enemies.

But in both instances, there's actually no doubt, absolutely no doubt, that it's God who is responsible for achieving all this. We're even told in verse 15 that the river is at peak flow, as I said before.

Just in case you think that the people were just going to wade across it because it was during the dry season. No, this crossing can only be achieved because God was doing it.

Now, some of the older generation at the time would have remembered when God parted the Red Sea. Remember, everyone above the age of 21 died in the wilderness, but some younger than that, they could enter the land.

[8 : 12] But this is now a chance, not just for those older ones, but this is now a chance for all of them present, a new generation to witness God's power anew. And so we find that no sooner did the ark touch the water's edge that the river stopped flowing.

It piled up at a town called Adam, which I think, if you consult the commentaries, is about 19 miles away. And it stayed that way until all Israel had crossed over.

And then we read that this amazing feat had God's desired outcome. Because, look again, jumping forward a bit, if we look at verse 14 of chapter 4, we see words which actually match those in verse 7.

We hear echoes. Verse 14 says, 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 stood in awe of Moses.

Exactly what God said in verse 7 comes to pass in verse 14. And this too is an echo of what occurred with Moses.

[9 : 28] Remember the comparison, the parallels between the parting of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan. Because if we look, you don't have to look, actually it's on the slide, but if we read Exodus chapter 14 and verse 31, which is the account of the parting of the Red Sea, we read that when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord on the day that Moses parted the Red Sea, displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

In both cases, God's power was displayed, but the people also recognized God's anointed leader. God wants them to know firstly that he will lead them, but then secondly that he's appointing a leader through whom he will save them.

And after all, if you know what Joshua's name means in Hebrew, it actually means God saves, doesn't it? But third, God also wants them to know that when he saves, he's simply acting in fulfillment of past promises.

That is what God has said in the past, he's now bringing to pass. And we discover that when we study verse 10 closely. So, let me read it.

Actually, I'll read from verse 9. So, chapter 3 and verse 9. This is what it says. Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites.

[11 : 04] See, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now, it's a bit of a mouthful, isn't it? I had nearly tripped over it. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth.

Now, my English teacher used to say to me, never have more than one off within a clause. Well, we've got three here. So, anyway, Bible was written in Hebrew, not English.

So, that's fine. But the phrase, Lord of all the earth, is actually an interesting one. It's actually used again in verse 13. So, if you go down to verse 13, you notice that there are actually two lords there. So, there's the Lord of all the earth and the Ark of the Lord. But actually, those two lords are different words in Hebrew. You can tell that because the first one is in small caps.

All letters are in small caps. Whereas, Lord of all the earth only has capital L. Lord of all the earth, then, is actually a reference to God as creator.

[12 : 03] He's the master of the universe, if you like, with dominion over all creation. But because God has a special relationship with Israel, He's also their Lord. Lord, capital L-O-R-D.

It's His covenantal name with Israel. And so, when Joshua says, this is how you know, I think what he's doing is he's pointing to the Ark and saying, see the Ark? Remember God's promises to your forefathers.

These are the very promises He's about to fulfill. And when Joshua says, come here and listen to the words of the Lord, what he's doing is he's about to repeat the promises that God has already made to their forefathers.

So, the list of nations we have in verse 10, well, they remind us of a similar list that God used when He first made His promise to Abraham. So, again, on the slide, Genesis chapter 15 and 18 to 19, there's a list of nations.

It's not exactly the same, but it reminds us that God has actually made this promise before. And then, one of the three things in the Ark, well, I don't know if you know, but one of the three things in the Ark is actually the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.

[13 : 15] And how does the Ten Commandments begin? Well, with these words which I put on the screen. They come from Exodus chapter 20. It says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of slavery.

And when God brought them out of Egypt, He did so because He had promised Abraham that He would. and when He fulfilled that promise, He actually gave Moses another promise.

Well, same promise, but repeated in Exodus chapter 3 and verse 7. He promised that He would bring them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of the, and here's the list again, Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

The Gargashites don't get a mention, but it's a similar list, isn't it? And so now God is reinforcing His promise one more time through Joshua. He does this so that they may know for sure that God will drive these nations out of the land.

It's like standing in the ocean at Portsea. I've never done that, but imagine if you're standing at the ocean, in the ocean, the back beach, that is, not the bay side, at Portsea, and having wave upon wave just keep coming upon you again and again.

[14:37] Well, God's promises are like these waves. They keep coming again and again on Israel. And why does God go to such trouble? It's because He wants them to know that He's trustworthy, that He fulfills all that He promises.

Israel must learn that when they hear His voice, they will know that God will certainly do it. And so, in light of this overwhelming assurance, the question is, how is Israel to respond?

Well, that's in our fourth instance of the phrase in verse 24. But before we get there, let's just finish the story of what's happened. Because as the ark enters the Jordan and the river dries up, Joshua then does another unusual thing.

He appoints twelve men, one from each tribe, and each is to pick up a stone from the river. Now, these stones are going to be different from those on the land because they've been smoothed by the water erosion.

And it says there that it's actually quite large because each of the stones were carried on a man's shoulder. But these twelve stones are then placed on the banks of the river at Gilgal, on the other side of the river.

[15:55] Now, just so you know, not that we'll get much into it, there's actually some doubt as to the exact wording of chapter 4 and verse 9, we didn't read it, but some manuscripts have it that another twelve stones were placed in the river in place of the twelve stones that were taken out.

But either way, it doesn't really matter, the message is clear. These twelve stones are actually to serve as a lasting memorial. And so, imagine in years to come, you know, whenever an Israelite family takes a day trip down to Gilgal, you know, not driving, maybe on camel or something, I don't know.

And then they wander by the river at this point and they see the stones. The children would then ask, you know, as they do in verse 22 of chapter 4, Mommy, Daddy, what do these stones mean? And it would be then that it would allow the parents to actually instruct them and to tell them of the mighty salvation which God achieved by carrying them across the Jordan.

And one of the things they ought to say is in verse 24. They would say that the Lord all these mighty things 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.

[17:16] God showed to all the nations that it is the Lord of all the earth and therefore Israel and others should give what is due to God to always fear Him and worship and revere Him for who He is, the Lord of all the earth.

Now friends, if you haven't picked up on this already, then here's the very important point for tonight. God has just shown us in this story that the very consistent way in which He always acts. He has shown us that He always speaks before He acts. He always promises and then fulfills. For that is the way that we will know that He is always faithful to His word.

That is the way we'll know that God is trustworthy. And because He's trustworthy, then the only way, the only right way for us to respond is to fear Him, to put our lives in His hands and to trust Him fully and trust the promises that He gives to us.

Now God could have acted without speaking, and then explain things afterwards. But that's not His way. That's not His way because He wants us to live by the promises of His word.

[18:31] Now in fact, I think God actually does one more thing. And that is, He actually leaves a lasting testimony for future generations as well. just like those 12 stones by the river.

They're for those actually who haven't witnessed firsthand what God has done, but yet need to trust in God's word as well. Now these 12 stones are actually merely prompts, isn't it?

the lasting testimony that is being passed on is the word, and it's the word that is actually found in the book of the law. God actually calls all these things that we've read tonight to be written down, hasn't He?

So that all might know, including those that come after, what God has done, and so fear Him. It all started when Moses wrote all these things down.

We wouldn't have time to turn to it, but in Deuteronomy chapter 31 and verse 24, it tells us that Moses actually wrote out all that's in the book of the law. Everything that's happened from Genesis to Deuteronomy, Moses wrote down in the book of the law.

[19 : 41] And that's how in chapter 1 and verse 8, God is able to command Joshua, who has now taken hold of that book, to keep the book of the law, not turning to the right or left of it.

Then later, when we get to the end of this book, Joshua himself records the events under his leadership. That's how we get the book of Joshua. If you want, you can look up later Joshua chapter 24 and verse 26.

That's where it is. But this tradition of writing down all that God has done keeps going and going. God causes all that He has done to be written down so that by the time we get to Jesus, we have every one of God's promises recorded all of them pointing to its fulfillment in Jesus.

And when the gospel writers wrote what they did, they were acutely aware of this because all four of them keep referring back to this very pattern. Every gospel writer took pains to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises.

So Matthew, for example, uses again and again the phrase, this took place to fulfill what was written and then quotes the Old Testament. Mark, in his opening chapter, he quotes from the Old Testament at length showing how Jesus fulfills all that has been written in the Old Testament.

[20 : 58] Then Luke, at the end of his gospel, he recounts how Jesus, after He was resurrected, he explained to the disciples that everything must be fulfilled, this is in chapter 24, everything must be fulfilled that is written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

And then he proceeds to open their minds so that they might understand the Scriptures. And then in our second reading tonight, John says that he has recorded the signs of Jesus so that we may know that Jesus is the Messiah.

The word Messiah referring, of course, to the Old Testament promise of God's Savior. And then he says that by believing, we can have life in His name.

Well, the word for belief in our chapter tonight, the corresponding word is fear. It's the same thing. It means not just mentally agreeing that something is true, but actually living in humble submission to the one who is trustworthy.

Living in submission to the one who has fulfilled all His promises. So friends, if there's any among us tonight, if you're not a believer of Jesus yet, then can I urge you to examine these promises of God and see that God can be trusted.

[22 : 15] Even though these promises were written thousands of years ago, yet every one of them has been fulfilled completely in Christ Jesus. But for the rest of us, brothers and sisters, well, I talked about plans at the start, didn't I?

And I suspect that if you were one of the Israelites, it would have been natural for you to want to know the details of the conquest. You would want to know things like, you know, which cities are we going to attack first?

You know, do we send all the fighting men or maybe just one tribe and save the rest for other battles? You know, and when we have the land, you know, which tribe is going to get what areas? These are the sort of questions that I would ask if I was one of them. But that's not how God did it, is it? That's not God's plan. That is, His plan wasn't to reveal all these details initially.

And why not? Well, well, I think it's because God wanted to teach them something that's even more important. God wanted to teach them to fear Him always. That is, to trust in Him and to rely on His word.

[23 : 21] You see, the critical issue wasn't the conquest or the enemies in the land. No, the critical issue for Israel was actually their faith and whether they would trust the Lord. And I suspect that's often our problem too, isn't it?

we want to know all the details of our lives. But actually, what matters to God is not where we work or where we live or who we marry. No, what matters to God most is that we learn to trust Him.

That we learn to take every promise in His word to heart and live knowing that He will bring them to pass. And so, for example, He doesn't promise that we'll be rich and comfortable, but He did promise that if we seek the kingdom first, then all these things, all that we need will be added to us. He doesn't promise a life without sickness or disease, but He promises that His grace is sufficient for us, that His strength is made perfect in weakness. He doesn't promise that we will never suffer, but He does promise that for all of us who endure with patience, our present suffering will be nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.

Now, it's not that we can't ask God for details or what to do next, what the direction is, but we need to ask and pray bearing in mind that even if the details are not revealed to us, we can still trust in

the Lord, we can trust in His word, and we can live by faith in Him.

[24 : 54] Now, friends, I'm personally not the type to enjoy uncertainty. I don't know about you. I love long-term planning. I love nutting out details, you know, as soon as possible.

If you ask Alyssa how I plan my holidays, you know, down to the, yep, anyway, find details. And yet, I've seen the wisdom in God's ways as I've, in one sense, grown up, that when He brings uncertainty in life, in my life, it's because He wants to teach us to trust Him.

It's not because He wants to withhold it just for the fun of it. No, He does that so that we will learn to trust in Him. Because we can't trust Him if everything is given to us, can we? But, when we need, when there is uncertainty and we need to actually rely on God and trust that what He says will come to pass, that is what we learn, that's how we learn faith in life.

So, friends, let me encourage you not to be upset when you face such times. I know it doesn't sit easy when, you know, things are uncertain in our lives. But when things like that happen, please realize that God is allowing it for our good.

He's learned, He's doing that so that we might learn to trust Him, to experience that He is a trustworthy God, that He will continue to save us, to deliver us, to watch over us, even as He's already done that in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 29] God is absolutely trustworthy. What we've seen tonight and everything that we read in the Bible proves that. So, let us fear Him always as it says in verse 24 and follow Him wholeheartedly wherever He leads.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for every promise in Your Word. We thank You that You've spoken, You've fulfilled, and we can read it and we can see it.

And that causes us to know that You are absolutely trustworthy. Help us then to fear You. Father, I pray for people that might be struggling in life at the moment with uncertainty, perhaps with great pain and suffering.

And Father, I just want to ask that You assure them tonight that even though they cannot see past the present as to what is going to happen to them and how things will resolve themselves, help them to look to You.

We don't have the ark anymore, but help them to look to Jesus and follow Him because He has saved us by what He's done on the cross. Help us to trust that what You promise will come to pass.

[27 : 56] We pray and ask this in the name of our Savior, in the name of Jesus. Amen.