

**FOR YE HAVE NOT PASSED THIS  
WAY HERETOFORE  
JOSHUA 3:4**

Text: Joshua 3:4

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Introduction:

This passage always comes to mind as we near the close of this year and anticipate the beginning of a new.

Israel had been in the wilderness for 40 years. Now they are about to cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

The Israelites were about to go into a new land— A land where they've never been.

They knew not what the future had hidden in the form of opposition; they knew not what forces were hiding behind the mountain; they couldn't tell how difficult the path through the mountains would be.

Joshua's officers were saying to the Israelites, "You're about to take a journey to where you've never been before. You're about to go down a road that is new to you. You're about to travel through strange territory."

That, in principle, is exactly where you and I stand right now, as we embark upon a brand new year. We have no way of knowing what awaits us in the New Year. We don't know what gains or losses, or what joys or sorrows, are waiting for us.

You or I do not know whether death, disease, or disaster will come our way this year. You and I do not know what tests or trials we will face.

I'm thankful that in his instructions to Joshua and the Israelites, God has given to all of us four sure, dependable guidelines for traveling in strange territory and doing so victoriously.

## **1. WE MUST REMAIN IN GOD'S PRESENCE (VS. 3-4)**

### **Joshua 3:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. <sup>4</sup> Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed *this* way heretofore.

To the Israelites, the ark symbolized the presence of God. In that ark were the following items:

- First, the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been written by the hand of God himself.

The Ten Commandments testified to our need for a Savior, and then they served as a blueprint for the Christian life.

- Second, a supernaturally preserved pot of manna.

This reminded them that God is one who can satisfy. The Lord said later, in John 6:35:

**John 6:35**

<sup>35</sup> And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

- Thirdly, Aaron's budding rod.

This would remind the people that God is a miracle-working God. Nothing is impossible with him.

We need to keep our eyes on the ark – the presence of God.

Note also:

There was a space between the ark and people (v. 4).

Why the space?

God wanted the ark to be clearly visible to everyone.

Had there been no space between the ark and the people, those who followed closely behind it would obscure the view of the others—only those in the first few ranks had been able to behold it.

But being borne by the priests a little over a half of a mile ahead of the people, the ark would be visible to the whole multitude.

If the crowd followed too closely, only those in front could see it. Every Israelite would end up following the person in front of him.

We are not to follow people we are to follow the Lord.

Too often we set people up as idols.

We follow their practices, procedures, philosophies, programs, and promotions.

All of these have become replacements for the presence of God.

Illustration:

Several years ago a Methodist minister, Harold Bosley, told a story from his student days at the University of Chicago in the 1930s.

He and some fellow students went to a conference that was being held at a large black church on the north side of Chicago. The conference featured a panel of four speakers who were discussing how to deal with the problems of life. One of the speakers was the attorney, Clarence Darrow, who had gained prominence as the defense lawyer in the famous Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee.

Those were the dark, difficult days of the Great Depression in America. People were in desperate need, but couldn't find jobs, and there was despair throughout the land--but, of all people, the blacks of Chicago seemed to be suffering even more than others.

When Clarence Darrow rose to speak, he began to talk about those issues, and the hard times that the blacks were experiencing. In the course of his remarks he said, "But, I don't understand it. You sing such great music. I have heard you singing here today. Amid all the woes of life, how can you sing? What in the world do you have to sing about in the face of all you're going through?"

He intended that as a rhetorical question, not expecting anyone to answer, but quickly a woman stood up right in front of him and said, "Why do we sing? What do we have to sing about? We have Jesus to sing about!" - and all over the congregation people shouted, "Amen! Amen!"

The songwriter wrote:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in his wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of his glory and grace.

## **2. WE MUST RELY ON GOD'S POWER (VS. 5, 15-17)**

### **Joshua 3:5**

<sup>5</sup> And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

### **Joshua 3:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) <sup>16</sup> That the waters which came down from above stood *and* rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that *is* beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, *even* the salt sea, failed, *and* were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. <sup>17</sup> And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

Would it not be better to wait until the river had subsided and the flood season was over?

Would it not be better to wait until they might be able to wade through when the river was low?

Man's inability would furnish the most suitable opportunity for God to display His power.

God selected a month when conditions were such as to form the most suitable background for a glorious display of His power.

He didn't defer the crossing of the river until the end of summer, when it had been at its lowest, but chose the month when it was at its broadest and deepest, that His hand might be the more plainly seen.

Let the banks of Jordan be filled to the brim, filled till they rush over it, it is just as easy to Omnipotence to divide them and dry them up then, as it would be if they were narrow, and shallow: it is all one unto the Lord.

Here was a real test of FAITH to the priest.

NO doubt it seemed somewhat crazy to wade into the flooded Jordan.

It was going to be have to be a STEP of faith!

God's power is activated by the faith of these priests. God could have divided the Jordan without the priest, but the priest could not divide the waters without God.

As the consciousness of God's presence produces a life without dread, so the comprehension of God's power produces a life without dismay.

Illustration:

In 1939 the people of England were a troubled and fearful people. The Second World War was underway. Hitler had invaded Poland. It was obvious that he had other conquests in mind, as well--and the people of England were deeply disturbed over what might lie ahead.

On Christmas Day that year, 1939, King George addressed the nation, and at the close of his speech quoted the words of an obscure Canadian woman named Minnie Louise Haskins.

The little piece she wrote was entitled, "The Gate of the Year."

Here is the excerpt that King George quoted to encourage his people: "And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the



hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

We must rely on the hand and power of God then there will be no need of fear.

We must Recognize the Presence of God, and Rely on the Power of God.

Notice also:

### **3. WE MUST REST ON GOD’S PROVISIONS (VS. 7)**

#### **Joshua 3:7**

<sup>7</sup> And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with thee.

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.”

Just as God was with the saints of old, He is with us today. God can still send revival; God can still save soften hardened heart, God can still save sinners; God can still provide our needs; God can still mend broken homes.

God has not grown weaker over the years. His power has not diminished at all. It is our faith that has become weaker.

We need to learn to live on His provisions! God knows perfectly well what we need even before we ask.

### A. He Will Supply

#### **Philippians 4:19**

<sup>19</sup> But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

### B. He Will Sustain

#### **Psalms 55:22**

<sup>22</sup> Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.

### C. He Will Strengthen

#### **Psalms 27:14**

<sup>14</sup> Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

#### **Psalms 31:24**

<sup>24</sup> Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.

Again, we must Recognize the Presence of God, Rely on the Power of God, Rest in the Provisions of God and:

## **4. WE MUST RESPECT GOD'S PRECEPTS (VS. 8)**

### **Joshua 3:8**

<sup>8</sup> And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

I think it is worth our attention to note here that the people were commanded to follow the priests as far as they carried the ark, but no farther.

God's children today are responsible to heed and obey His servants only while they set forth and honor Him of whom the ark was a figure.

It is to the God of the Word and the Word of God that we owe our allegiance or loyalty to.

We must not spend our time looking for loopholes.

Illustration:

Comedian W. C. Fields could make audiences roar with laughter, yet he himself was chronically unhappy. Religion apparently played no part in his life. But it's been said that as he faced the possibility of dying, he started to devote time to reading the Bible.

When he was asked about his new interest in Scripture, Fields, always the comedian, would reply, "I'm looking for loopholes, my friend, I'm looking for loopholes."

God means what He says and says what He means.

The command was stated exactly as it was meant. There was no room for interpretation or discussion. God meant what He said. God knows what He is saying.

The Psalmist wrote:

**Psalm 119:128**

<sup>128</sup> Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all things to be right; *and* I hate every false way.

Illustration:

A tourist once approached a sign that read, "ROAD CLOSED. Do not enter." However, the road ahead looked good, so the tourist ignored it.

A few miles down the road he came to a bridge that had collapsed.

He turned around and retracted the route.

When he came back to the sign that he had ignored, someone had written on this side, "Welcome back, stupid."

The priest had to stand so that the others could stride.

It wasn't until all were passed clean over that they could then proceed.

So it is we too must stand so that others can stride.

Close:

The Israelites were going into strange territory just as we are as we step into a New Year.

Israel had to trust what God said to get them there.

Most all of the opportunities that were ours this year are forever gone.

As we prepare to close out this year and step into a new one none of us know what this New Year will bring.

But if we'll make God's precepts our standard, His promises our stay, and His power our strength, and His presence our sufficiency, we need not dread the future but we can delight in all that He will do and bring to pass.