

**“Moving Day”**

**Joshua 3:1-17**

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For

Calvary Baptist Church

Lexington, Kentucky

June 14, 2020

I suspect many thought this day would never come. It had been forty years since the Israelites left Egypt under Moses’ leadership in search of a peaceful and prosperous homeland.

I am confident no one dreamed it would take this long to get to the land God promised Moses, but it did. Now, however, their wandering days were coming to an end because it was time to cross the Jordan River and to begin the last part of this epic journey.

Moving day finally arrived.

Joshua, Moses’ successor, led the Israelites to the eastern edge of the Jordan River. There they faced a challenge similar to the one they encountered at the Red Sea soon after leaving Egypt forty years earlier. The Jordan River was at flood stage due to heavy spring rains and melting snow on Mount Hermon. The current was unmercifully swift.

How were they going to cross safely to the other side?

Joshua instructed his people to set up camp for three days. He encouraged them to make final preparations, physically and spiritually. This meant getting rid of excess baggage and strengthening their faith through repentance and prayer.

At the same time, Joshua sent two spies across the river to Jericho. He wanted them to discover what kind of reception they would receive or resistance they would face after crossing the river and moving into Canaanite territory.

When the spies returned, they told Joshua of Rahab's hospitality. This courageous woman befriended and protected them while providing the information they needed to take back to Joshua.

The spies continued by telling Joshua the citizens of Jericho were aware of the Israelites' nearby presence and were faint of heart. They knew they were no match for the emboldened Hebrews and their faithful God.

This was the good news Joshua had hoped to hear. It affirmed his decision to carry out his plans to cross over the Jordan and to enter this land of hope and promise.

Moses sent officers to each tribe along the river and told them to gather their belongings. The officers instructed every tribe to begin moving when the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord passed their way.

One by one the tribes lined up along the Jordan River. One man from each tribe was selected to accompany the priests to the edge of the water. In unison the priests and the representatives from the twelve tribes stepped into the water. As they did, the waters parted, much like they did for Moses at the Red Sea, and the children of Israel once again passed through on dry ground.

Once everyone had safely crossed, the water began flowing again. After living in Egypt for over four hundred years and wandering in the wilderness for forty more, the Israelites finally stood on land that would belong to them and their descendants.

Every time I read this text, I am drawn to the scene it describes. I find it both fascinating and enlightening. I also find it helpful as I make decisions on my journey of faith. Let me explain.

In this text, the Israelites were on one side of the Jordan River. Their hopes and dreams for a better life were on the other.

Crossing that river would not be easy. It would require the highest level of courage and faith.

And yet, with God's help and under Joshua's leadership, they did it. They crossed to the other side in pursuit of a new and better life.

**What river do you need to cross?** What dream is beckoning you to start some daring adventure? What vision of a better way to live has captured your attention? What painful experience is pleading with you to change direction?

**Why haven't you already crossed that river?** How many times have you walked up to the edge only to turn back?

Will it help you to know others struggle with this decision, too? You are not alone. It is more common than you think.

This was not even the first time the Israelites had been this close to this river and the Promise Land. Years earlier, Moses sent twelve scouts across the Jordan River to survey the territory so they could bring back a report.

Joshua and Caleb, two of the scouts, said they could move ahead with their plans to cross the Jordan, but the other ten disagreed. They felt the challenge was too great.

Those ten must have been very persuasive because the Israelites turned away from the Jordan and wandered in the wilderness for forty long years. That's a long time to live apart from your hopes and dreams.

I don't want you to do this. I don't believe God wants you to do this, either. I know Joshua doesn't.

Twenty-two times in Joshua 3 and 4, the word 'cross' or 'crossing' is mentioned. Twenty-two is a lot in just two chapters. Why the emphasis on this word?

Life is a journey. We are always on the move. Circumstances change, and these changes demand that we make changes as well.

Often these changes are daunting and intimidating. They look as threatening as the Jordan River in the spring when melting snow on Mount Hermon and seasonal rains cause its banks to overflow. Far too often we put off making these changes, waiting for a better time that never seems to come.

Perhaps this describes your life, and today you must decide whether you are going to cross the river that leads to a new and better life or you are going to turn away.

**How can you cross the river this time?** How can you keep from walking up to the edge again and turning back?

I think you begin by listening to your faith more than your fears. Let a heart attuned to God's Spirit speak louder than your doubts.

I know this is not easy. Charting a new course is never easy. Fear of the unknown and a lack of confidence undermine even our best intentions.

If you have ever started a new job, changed careers or opened a business, you know it.

If you have left home to go to college or the military, you do, too.

If you have buried a mate or a marriage that at one time looked so promising, you know what it is like to face a raging river.

If you have relocated to a new city or walked into a sanctuary without knowing where everyone usually sits, you know how awkward it feels.

If you have reconsidered a long held belief and changed your mind, you know what it is like to be criticized and ostracized.

If you have picked up a microphone and spoken up for those who have no voice at the table where decisions are made, you know what it is like to have a lump in your throat.

If you are struggling with an addiction that is destroying your relationships and life, you know how intimidating change looks.

**So, how do you take the first step that leads you across the river that stands between you and your hopes and dreams?** Begin by doing what Joshua and the Israelites did when they approached the Jordan River. Put your faith in a God who has a great amount of experience leading people from where they are to where they need to be.

Why was it important to Joshua that everyone see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord before they entered the river and while they were in the water? They needed to know God was with them, not just on the river bank where it was safe but also in the river, the scariest and most dangerous part of this journey.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will go with you wherever you go," Joshua told the Israelites immediately after becoming their leader. It was a message he heard Moses voice on many occasions. It was a message Joshua repeated four times prior to standing on the river's edge (Joshua 1:6,7,9,18).

Why? Joshua knew God could be counted on to provide the strength, courage, determination, will-power and stamina the Israelites needed to cross to the other side. Joshua was confident God would be by their side every step of the way.

**Will you let God help you cross the river standing between you and your dreams today?** Will you draw close to the Lord and rely upon the Holy Spirit to provide the wisdom, understanding, strength, courage, determination and stamina you need to make life-changing decisions?

Will you listen to and follow the advice of the people God sends your way to help you as the Israelites listened to Joshua? Will you put down your defenses and quit making excuses long enough to receive their guidance and encouragement?

And then, will you let God use you to help someone standing on the edge of their river looking wistfully over to the other side? Will you share your story as a way of inspiring and motivating them?

I hope and pray you will. Your story and companionship could be the very thing that parts the water for them.