

Getting Our Feet Wet

Joshua 3:14-17

There's a little song that goes like this: *"God has something to say to you, God has something to say. Listen! Listen! Pay close attention! God has something to say."*

I believe God has something to say to us this morning. And I believe it is so important that our response to what God is saying could well determine whether we cross the river or turn back into the wilderness.

For just a moment, use that phenomenal gift called "memory" to go back in time. Allow your mind to fly back to that time when you had your back up against a wall, in a manner of speaking. You didn't know where to turn. You had exhausted all possible solutions. Worry gnawed at you, especially during the midnight hours when you couldn't sleep. Panic set in, and you wondered if you would ever get through that situation. If you took the matter to God, you found it almost impossible to leave it with Him, because you kept shouldering the burden again. It was almost as if you felt that God wouldn't be able to handle it, or that He wouldn't choose to handle it.

Maybe you kept your Bible handy, and searched its pages tirelessly in an effort to find what it was that God wanted you to do. Then somehow through the haze and fog of worry, a light began to shine: dimly at first, but then brighter and brighter. You began to hope and pray even harder, believing at last that somewhere there must be an answer to your dilemma. God was leading you to do something you had never done before, and even though there was no other alternative, still you were afraid to take that first step.

But when you did—do you remember what happened? God proved Himself to be true and faithful to His promises, and He gloriously, miraculously opened the way for you. Do you remember what that was like?

Or, perhaps you are there right now. At this moment, you are afraid to take that first step of faith, because you fear that God will not come through for you.

The priests may have felt that way the day the Israelites were to cross the Jordan River, even though it was flooded at that particular season of the year. With no bridges, and the available fords flooded, the Israelites had no other option except to listen to what God told them to do. And it may be that God has you backed up in a

corner right now, because He wants to bring you to the place where you have no other option but Him.

Pay attention to what happened that day beside the Jordan River. Verse fourteen tells us that when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, *“the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them.”* The ark, you remember, represented the presence of God with the people, and when the ark moved in front of the people, that signified that the Lord God was leading them. But here was the problem: the priests were carrying that ark straight towards the river! And even though they knew that God was leading them, perhaps they were afraid to actually step out into the water.

But *“Listen! Listen! Pay close attention”* to what verses 15-16 say: *“Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet [how beautiful that word becomes in this context!] as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing.”* The level of the river did not begin to go down until the priests—the spiritual leaders of the people—were willing to get their feet wet!

God had pre-arranged this crossing at that particular time, when the Jordan was at flood stage, in order to show His people something about Himself they would need to know once they entered Canaan. He revealed certain truths about Himself that would help them learn to trust Him in every situation they would face in the future. That’s why God told them to cross the Jordan when it was flooded, just so they could see His awesome power.

And it may be that God is leading you and me to do some things which are frightening, because He wants to reveal certain things about Himself we are going to need to know in the future. There are some things He wants us to know. Our “Jordan” may be flooded, but that doesn’t mean that God’s will is for us to pitch our tents in the wilderness. Our “Jordan” may be flooded, but God tells us to move forward anyway.

1 God wants us to know that He doesn’t always work in the same way every time.

Joshua and Caleb were two of only a very few alive who had actually been there, and had seen with their own eyes how God had parted the waters of the Red Sea. With the army of Pharaoh not far away, the Israelites had blamed Moses for their dilemma. But God told Moses to stretch out his walking stick over

the sea to divide the water so the people could pass through. Can you imagine what it must have been like to have walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, with the walls of water churning on both sides?

Nearly all those people who passed through the Red Sea had died in the wilderness. God had not allowed them to enter Canaan because of their unbelief. But these who now stood with Joshua on the banks of the Jordan had heard the story many times. It had become part of their heritage passed from parent to child, a sacred memory. They knew every detail of how God had worked that miracle at the Red Sea, and they may have been expecting God to do the same thing here at the Jordan.

Think about what that means! The priests may have marched within twenty yards of that river, expecting it to be divided the same way God had divided the Red Sea for Moses. After all, God had done it for their fathers, so why not now? But no, the river rushed right on past.

They marched within a dozen yards of the water, but there was no change in the way the river raged. They marched within fifteen feet, then ten, then five, and then they had to make the decision: "Is God going to open the way for us or not?" We can identify with the hesitation they may have felt.

But as soon as their feet touched the water, something happened sixteen miles upstream, at a town called Adam. The water flow was cut off! Completely! How long do you think it would take for the flood waters to travel sixteen miles? Unless we knew the speed and depth of the current, we cannot even guess. But it's very likely that the priests may have waded out until the water was lapping at their chins before the level of the river started to go down. The point is this: the priests were soaking wet before they saw the way God was working on their behalf.

That wasn't the way it had been before! How many Israelites do you suppose would have crossed into the land of Canaan if the priests had backed out of the water, shaking their heads (the way some of us do!) and said, "See, Joshua, we knew it wouldn't work this way! This is not the way we do things around here"? Yet God had parted the waters of the Red Sea, and He would stop the flow of the Jordan River, but He didn't choose to do it in the same way as before! That was something the Israelites needed to know as they marched into Canaan. We need to learn this truth about God as we wade out into the Jordan: God doesn't always work in the same way every time.

Jesus didn't. For example, He healed people in several different ways. Once He mixed His own saliva with dust to make mud, and placed that mud on the eyes of one who was blind. Another time He merely touched those who needed healing. Once He merely spoke the words, and a servant was healed. Think about the way you first became aware of your sins. Your experience was not like that of the Apostle Paul, but it was just as valid and life-changing.

We, too, have some sweet and pleasant memories of what God has done here in our church in the years which have flowed past. Some of us have been around longer than others, and could tell of the ways God has worked here among us through the years. Those experiences have been rich and meaningful. Yet there is no guarantee that this is the way God will work among us in the future, and we should not say God cannot part the waters before us unless He does it in exactly the way He did before.

As we stand on the banks of our own personal Jordan River, let us hear this truth from God's Word once again: God doesn't always work in the same way every time.

2 God wants us to know that He has all the power necessary to provide for His people.

What a test of faith this was! Was their God more powerful than any other, the way He claimed? Did He really have the power to open up the way through this raging river? Joshua had told the people in verse thirteen, *"As soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord...set foot in the Jordan, the water flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."* They had heard about it, but did God really have that kind of power?

It was quite an easy thing for them to sit around the campfires discussing the way God had parted the Red Sea forty years before, but this was something else. Now they were being asked to put their lives on the line by walking into a flooded river!

Verse 16 tells us that when the priests put their feet in the water, the water from upstream stopped flowing. *"It piled up in a heap,"* is the way the Scripture puts it, as though it had been dammed. Some have tried to explain this away by saying there must have been a landslide. In fact, there have been two other times in history when the Jordan River was completely dammed up. So it could have been that this was what happened those long years ago in the time of Joshua.

But what difference does that make? So what if God used an earthquake or a landslide to stop up the water? The miracle is that it happened at that precise moment, and that the flow of water was held back until the people were safely on the other side, and the priests had stepped out of the dry river bed. The point is that God has all the power necessary to provide for His people.

He has the same amount of power today. There is nothing you need that your Heavenly Father cannot provide for you. There is nothing our church needs that our Heavenly Father cannot provide for us.

But we may have to get our feet wet, too. We could approach a goal or a dream or a long-range plan, and say, “Oh, the river is too high!” Or if we could translate that into modern language, it would sound like this: “Oh, the cost is too high!” And we would turn back from that challenge with the dust of resistance and faithlessness—the dust of the wilderness—still on our feet, because we never stepped into the water.

If God leads us to do something, if He commands us to march through the river, then He will open up the way for us, too. He will provide all we need to do all He asks us to do. God’s Word to us today is to continue moving toward the goal, and trust Him to open the way.

3 God wants us to know that He works with perfect timing in the lives of His people.

We’ve already pointed out how far away the water was stopped up, and how the priests may have waded out until the water was at their chins before the level began to go down. That may have been so, but notice that not one of the priests carrying the ark of the covenant, nor one of the Israelites who crossed to the other side, drowned that day. Not one of them was swept away.

The timing of it was perfect. The river bed was not prepared ahead of time, so that it was dry the day before the people needed it to be so. And the water did not remain stopped up for days afterward, so the people could turn around and point at it and try to analyze it. When you’re in the middle of a miracle, you don’t have time to analyze it, or try to explain it away!

In fact, the timing was so perfect, that we read in Joshua 4:18, “*No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.*”

Isn't that the way it has been in your life? God has worked with perfect timing to give His people all they need to do all He commands them to do. Our church may be at a point where we are going to have to trust ourselves to the perfect timing of an omniscient God. If we wait until we have all the resources needed before we take that first step into the water, then we are no different than anyone else. If God's will is for us to go forward, then His Word to us today is that He works with perfect timing in the lives of His people.

4 God wants us to know what He expects of those who lead His people

Can you feel the excitement building? That was the time for the people to decide. "Are we going forward, or are we going to turn back?" That was the test for the Hebrew people. That was their time of decision; this is the time for us to decide. Are we going forward, or are we going to camp out here on the banks of our Jordan River? Do we believe God enough to actually step into the water?

But allow me to speak even plainer. God has called me to be His spokesman—His prophet—in this church. I cannot remain faithful to that commission if I shy away from the duty placed in front of me. I cannot remain faithful if I fail to preach the whole counsel of God. So allow me to point out a truth from our passage today: the flow of the river was stopped when the spiritual leaders of the people believed God enough to actually take the first step.

I believe the principle is just as true today. If the people whom God has placed in positions of leadership in this church are not willing to step out into the water—to step out in faith—then there are many who will never reach the other shore. The parallel is too great for us to ignore. The spiritual leaders in our church are the ones who should be leading our church to trust God more and more, to dare to dream, to accomplish the tasks God has for us to do.

That first step into the water may take the form of being the first to confess sin and get right with God. It may take the form of being the first to apologize for bad attitudes and wrong motives. It may take the form of being the first to propose daring plans for moving our church forward. That first step into the water may take the form of being the first to say, "True, we've never done it before, and true, the cost will be great, but our God is a great God and He has all the power necessary to provide for His people."

Leaders, hear the Word of the Lord! You are standing at the water's edge. Behind you are all the people of God, waiting to see what you will do. You are not carrying an ark, but you are carrying the trust this church has placed in you to guide them, and you are carrying the awesome responsibility given to you by God Himself. I'm convinced that if you and I are not willing to get our feet wet, then this church—as great as she is—will never cross over. God will send us back into the wilderness of tradition, dullness, fruitlessness and powerlessness until another generation rises to take our place!

Once before God had brought His people to the edge of Canaan, and then turned them back into the desert when they refused to believe Him and follow Him. He could have done it again, if the leaders of that particular generation had not believed Him enough to go in. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the Israelites to wander around in the desert, asking themselves, “What if we had *dared* to believe God? Just think of how much better things would have been for us!” The prayer of the deepest parts of my soul is that in five or ten years, should the Lord delay His return, that we will not have to say, “What if *we* had dared to believe God back in 2011? Just think of how it could have been!” My prayer is that we will never have to play the game of “What if?” in a spirit of shameful regret.

Listen! Listen! Pay close attention! God has something to say! God wants us to know at this point in our history that He doesn't always work the same way every time. He wants us to know that He has all the power necessary to provide for His people. He wants us to know that He works with perfect timing in the lives of His people. And He wants us to know what He expects of those who lead His people. We are at the moment of decision. The time is now. Step into the water—get your feet wet—or turn back.

What about you? Will you step into the water? Are you willing to get your feet wet?