

INTRODUCTION

A little girl, dressed in her Sunday best, was running as fast as she could, trying not to be late for Bible class. As she ran she prayed, "Dear Lord, please don't let me be late! Dear Lord, please don't let me be late!" As she was running and praying, she tripped on a curb and fell, getting her clothes dirty and tearing her dress. She got up, brushed herself off, and started running again. As she ran she once again began to pray, "Dear Lord, please don't let me be late ... But please don't shove me either!"

Sometimes I wish the Lord *would* shove me in the right direction! However, we learned last week when the children of Israel came to the border of the Promised Land with Moses, God didn't *shove* them in. They chose *not* to go in, so they missed the opportunity!

There is an old saying, "You only pass this way but once ... unless your wife is reading the roadmap." To counter that, someone has said the reason the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years is because like most men, Moses was too stubborn to stop and ask directions!

For forty long, boring years they circled the desert dunes, eating manna. Day after day: manna, manna, manna. They ate fried manna, boiled manna, grilled manna, manna soufflé, manna casserole ... they even tried ba-manna bread! Can you imagine how many times the older generation shook their heads in regret and said, "If only ... " Wasted opportunities are not a pretty thing. A wise person once wrote, "The saddest words of tongue or pen are these four words, 'What might have been.'"

The book of Joshua is about the second generation of God's people. Right now, at Green Acres, our current situation bears an amazing resemblance to the circumstances of Joshua and his congregation. We stand here 46 years after the beginning of our congregation, facing a new and bigger opportunity and a new challenge. We are the second generation. Will we move forward and claim our opportunity? As we read how God directed Joshua, let's apply these words to our situation:

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days, the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it." *Joshua 3:1-5*

Joshua 3:5 is our theme verse for Share the Joy, so let's read it together: Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." They were ready to move and the only thing standing between them and blessing was a river. The river was both the border and the barrier to blessing.

I have always been fascinated with rivers, and I have some great river memories. I have crossed the mighty Mississippi many times. I've been on the Rhine, the Thames, and the Seine. I've even walked across a bridge over the Rio Grande at midnight after I got left behind by one of our Mission Trip groups a few years ago! I've stood on the bank of the Amazon and could barely see the other bank five miles away. But my favorite river in the world is the Jordan River. I've seen it many times and had the joy of baptizing and reconfirming the baptism of several hundred people in its chilly waters. Somebody from our last trip even brought some water from the Jordan back and we are going to add it to our new baptistry when we baptize the first person there on May 6. There's nothing magical about that water, it's just our way of connecting with the water where Jesus was baptized. Today, we also stand on the border of claiming God's promise. Here's our challenge:

In order for us to move forward into a new facility, opportunity, challenge, we must first cross a river of impossibility—how?

There is an old gospel song written by Oscar Eliason in 1945. "Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible—He does the things others cannot do." Are you ready to cross the border to blessing? Here's how we can do it.

I. KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS (THE ARK) (3:1-4)

Joshua faced a tough challenge. But God made it simple. He told them to simply move when the Ark moved. Joshua 3 mentions the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned ten times. That's the key to fording the river of impossibility. What does it mean to us?

1. The Ark represents God's presence and power

The Ark was a rectangular box with a gold plated lid called the mercy seat. Two statues of cherubim stood on either side of the Ark with their outstretched wings over the mercy seat. The Ten Commandments—the word of God—were inside the box. Also inside was a bowl of manna, representing the provision of God. He fed them for forty years. In addition, Aaron's rod was also inside, which had budded and blossomed during a leadership crisis in which the people didn't want to follow Moses. It represented the protection of God. God's Shekinah glory often settled between the two cherubim. The Ark can be summarized in three words: God with us. Joshua told the Hebrews to just keep their eyes on the Ark. He didn't say, "I'm the leader follow me." He said, "Hark the Ark! Follow God!"

To us, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Ark of God. He is Emmanuel, which means, "God with us." He is the Word made flesh. He is God's provision and protection! The Spirit of Jesus is moving in our church during these days. He is leading us into a new land and into a new challenge. Our motto should be "Hark, the Ark!—follow Jesus!"

2. Following Jesus always leads into uncharted territory

The title of this message is taken from the words found in verse four where the Jews were told, “You’ve never been this way before.” As a church, we stand on the border of uncharted territory.

In terms of distance, we’re not moving very far. It’s only about 450 feet from the middle of this building to the middle of the new worship center. But the Jordan River was only about 150 feet wide during flood stage, but it represented a huge barrier. It wasn’t the distance; it was the direction that was significant.

People have asked me, “Pastor, what’s it going to be like when we move?” I told you last week some of the things I think we can expect, but I must be truthful with you. I really don’t know what’s going to happen. This is uncharted territory for me. We’ve never been this way before. I really don’t know what God is going to do. But like the old joke “Where does a 500 pound gorilla sleep?” (Anywhere he wants to). My attitude is this: What is God going to do? *Anything He wants to!* I’m just going to keep my eyes on the Ark and follow Him. That’s what Joshua did. God said, “Enter into the fullness of my blessing!” And just like my favorite childhood television show, Joshua hollered, “Head ‘em up! Move ‘em out!” We’re going to do the same!

3. We must respect the holiness of God

Notice God told the people to maintain a distance of about a thousand yards from the Ark. That was because of the holiness of God. He can’t be contained in a box. As Creator of the Universe, God transcends our existence. We must recognize and respect the transcendence of God. If you don’t know what that word means, let me bring it down to my level: You can’t get too “buddy, buddy” with God. He is different, holy. It’s a dangerous thing to transgress the holiness of God. If one of the Jews had touched the Ark, they would have died. The distance was also to prevent the people from crowding around it. By keeping everyone a thousand yards away, everyone else would be able to see it clearly. If we don’t respect the holiness of God, we actually block other people from seeing Him as He really is.

When we studied the book of Revelation, I pointed out some people expect that when they finally see Jesus face to face, they will run up and hug His neck or slap Him on the back like a long lost friend. Read Revelation 1 again. You are I are going to do exactly what the Apostle John did: We are going to fall on our faces like a dead man—that’s how awesome is the Holiness of God. Consider this:

WARNING: WE MUST BE SEEKING A BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR NOT A BEAUTIFUL BUILDING!

“Worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness.” (Psalm 29:2) I have known congregations that build a beautiful sanctuary, and they succumbed to the sin of pride and idolatry. And they lost the blessings of God. Churches can get so obsessed with buildings, they get what could be called an “edifice complex.” If we focus on a building rather than Jesus, we have turned back and we will wander in a spiritual desert for many years.

This building *is* a testimony to East Texas about what we believe about God. That’s why it is a beautiful building; we’ve haven’t cut corners. From the very start I challenged the Building

Committee to make it a first-class facility because God deserves our best—and they have done just that. And when you enter the building later this month, you will be tempted to look around and say, "Wow! What a beautiful building!" Please don't do that. Instead will you say, "Beautiful Savior I worship you and I rejoice that this building reflects a tiny part of the beauty that is your holiness and your character." Let's remember the building is a gathering place where Jesus can be proclaimed and worshiped.

II. KEEP YOUR LIFE CLEAN (CONSECRATE) (3:5)

If you were leading a military expedition in Joshua's day, what would you tell your troops? You might say, "Make sure your sword is sharpened and your shield and helmet in good order. Instead Joshua told the people, "Get yourselves ready spiritually!" As we face a potential \$6 million debt, you might expect me to say, "Get out your check books and your stock portfolios." Instead, I'm challenging you to do the same thing—prepare yourself spiritually!

The word "consecrate" isn't too familiar today, but it basically means to set your life apart for God's use. Occasionally, I will make reservations at a nice restaurant for Cindy and myself. We will be escorted to "our table" and sometimes there is a little card on the table reading, "Reserved for David and Cindy Dykes." That table has been "consecrated" or "reserved" for our use; nobody else is going to use it while we are there. When you consecrate yourself, you are saying, "God, my life is reserved exclusively for You." Here are three things you can do to consecrate yourself:

1. Get rid of your junk (sin)!

The word "consecrate" or "sanctify" was used to describe what the high priest did to cleanse himself on the Day of Atonement. According to Leviticus 16, the priest removed his old garments, stained with dirt and grime of the world. Then, he took water and carefully washed his entire body. Finally, he put on clean, new linen garments and a linen turban. Only then was he ready to offer the sacrifice to the Lord. That's a powerful picture of how we must sanctify ourselves to serve the Lord. Paul uses that language when he writes in Colossians 3:8-10, "But now, you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

Right now, there is still a lot of dirt and dust and trash in the new building. Before our first worship service, it will have to be thoroughly cleaned out. Can you say the same about your life? Your body is the real sanctuary and the temple of the Holy Spirit; will it be cleaned out? All of us would be outraged if on the day before the first service, someone hauled five hundred filthy, muddy, stinking hogs and let them run wild in the worship center. Let me tell you something that offends God far more than that—for you and I to allow some form of dirty, stinking sin to reside in our hearts. How about it? Is there any anger, rage, hard feelings, gossip or profanity in your life? Get rid of it. Confess it and turn from it. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness ... And the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son purifies us of every sin." (1 John 1:9,5)

2. Get into God's Word!

Only the blood of Jesus can wash away your sins, but it's the Word of God that can keep you clean. Jesus said, "Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you." (John 15:3). In Joshua 1:8, God told His people, "Don't let this book of the Law depart from your mouth." There is great value in reading the Bible aloud. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by HEARING, and hearing by the Word of God." It doesn't just say, "Faith comes by reading silently."

I want to stress again how we are emphasizing the power of the Word of God as we occupy this new building. I told you last week we planted a copy of one of my old Bibles in the deepest part of the foundation of the new building to signify we are church built upon the Word of God. The deepest point of our facility is the Word of God, and the highest point is the cross on the steeple—get the picture?

In addition, we wrote in 3-foot tall letters, "ENTER HIS GATES WITH THANKSGIVING AND INTO HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE" on the inner wall of the lobby. It's still there, underneath the drywall. And that verse from Psalm 100 will be rewritten on the wall so everyone can read it as they enter. There will be scripture written above every door entering the worship area - in fact, each door will be named after one of the fruits of the spirit! So you can tell someone to meet you at the "love" door or the "patience door!" In addition, months ago, our children wrote hundreds of scripture verses on sheets of paper and those have been placed between the walls in the building.

In the hours before the first service many of our members are going to stand in the pulpit and take turns reading the Bible aloud in that worship room. We are going to start with Genesis 1:1 and we aren't going to stop until we get to Revelation 22:21. It will take about 48 hours. So, I'm thrilled that many of you will stand in the pulpit and proclaim the word of God before I do. You'll have a chance to sign up to participate on Easter Sunday and we need some of you to volunteer for those wee hours of the morning! I remember we read the Bible aloud in this room for 24 hours as part of Discover the Joy, and it was amazing how God's presence was so real, many people wept as they read. This Bible reading is *not* to get the building ready for us, it's to get *us* ready for the building. We must sanctify ourselves. So get into the Word.

3. Get on your knees in prayer and fasting!

Jesus said, "If you remain in me and my word remains in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." John 15:7 Do you see the connection between the Word of God and prayer? Once again I challenge you to take several days in this remaining time leading up to May 6 to participate in this experience of prayer and fasting. Consider going from supper one night until supper the next night without eating; use that time to pray instead. Consider giving up lunch for a week—pray instead. Don't get so hung up on the details of fasting you neglect the main thing—to pray.

Here's what I want you to pray for:

1. Pray for our congregation, that God will send a spirit of revival among us. That God will break our hearts and turn our hearts toward Him.

2. Pray for the several thousand members who are on our rolls but never come. They have been able to say, "There's not room for me" before, but that excuse will be removed later this month. Pray God will bring them back to a place of fellowship with Him and His body. If you know some of these people, tell them you are praying for them.

3. Pray that our adversary, the devil will be rendered totally harmless in his attacks on our church during this critical time. We are under attack, that's for certain. We must put on our spiritual armor and hold up the shield of faith and wield the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. But when we are dressed for battle, Ephesians 6 tells us our battle plan is this, "and pray in the Spirit in all occasions."

III. KEEP MOVING FORWARD INTO THE RIVER (3:14-17)

To me, the most exciting part of the story is found in verses 14-17:

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carrying the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piles up in a heap a great distance away at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zerethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground."

What does this mean for us?

1. The Jordan is the borderline into blessing

Some people have mistakenly taught Canaan represents heaven and "crossing the Jordan" is a picture of physical death. That's not really correct. Alan Redpath correctly observes in his wonderful book on Joshua:

The crossing of the Jordan does not illustrate the passing of a soul into eternity, but rather it does illustrate the passing of a Christian from one level of Christian living to another. It marks the end of the self-life and the beginning of the Christ-life. Between these two levels of the Christian life rolls the mighty Jordan River - a river of impossibility.
(*Victorious Christian Living*, p.51)

Our church is standing on the border; will we move forward or go back? Some of you are on the border of salvation today; will you accept Jesus or go back? Some of you have been attending this church for years and you haven't joined yet; you are on the borderline of the blessing of

fellowship with a church family. Will you go forward? Have you been standing on the border of baptism? It's time to step forward. We are standing at the Jordan today. It may seem like a tough barrier, but it's really a border to blessing!

2. You'll never know God's power until you step into the water

Here is a tremendous lesson on faith. Lest you think the priests were simply tip-toeing through a shallow, gentle stream, let me tell you about the Jordan River. The name "Jordan" means "to descend." The water descends from the melted snow and the underground springs near Mount Hermon, which is 9,200 feet above sea level. It flows 30 miles into the Sea of Galilee and then the Jordan River delivers the water 65 miles to the Dead Sea, which is the lowest spot on earth, over 1,300 feet below sea level. So the water falls over 10,000 feet in about 95 miles - that's how it got its name, Jordan, "to descend." Can you imagine the power of the water? The Jordan has cut a deep crevasse and the banks of the river are steep and dangerous. Today, the Jordan has been reduced to a gentle trickle because the Israelis have dammed it and use it for irrigation. But 3,400 years ago, it would have been like looking across the Grand Canyon with the raging Colorado River surging through it—it would have been too dangerous for white water rafting!

So I want you to visualize these priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, descending down toward this barrier. Because it was flood season, there was a raging torrent before them. It was too deep to cross and the current was far too strong to swim through. And besides, you don't get many swimming lessons when you've spent all your life wandering through the desert! The first priests walked right up to the water: they faced a crisis of belief. "Hmmm, God said walk into it. Should I stand here and wait for the water to stop, or should I go ahead and step into the water by faith?" Now, these men could have been swept away by the swift current, but they decided, "sink or swim, live or die, let's obey God." And they stepped into the water by faith. Doesn't God have impeccable timing? Because like another line from one of my favorite shows, "About that time God showed up." He turned off the water.

A.W. Tozer writes:

"As the priests stepped into the waters, the river sixteen miles upstream at Adam piled up in a heap. They would have stood there all day waiting if they had not stepped out by faith and put their feet into the Jordan. God waited on them for 39 years in their unbelief before they were willing to cross over with Him. How many times do we come to new experiences with God and He patiently waits for us to step out by faith? And waits, and waits and waits. He waits for us to get our feet wet. We have no way of knowing HOW God will provide or deliver us and when we step out by faith He does it.

We stand at the same place. It's not going to be easy for us. We can't just waltz across this river. We are facing the possibility of a \$6 million debt. We are facing the challenge of thousands of new people coming onto our campus. We are going to have greater expenses than ever before. Each of us is going to be called upon to step up and serve the Lord in a new and different way. Are you willing to step into the water? Sure, it's scary, but here's the good news:

3. Jesus will be your pathway through the water

The priests carrying the Ark stood in the middle of the riverbed upstream and the thousands of Hebrew people walked across the riverbed (keeping their distance from the ark). The only reason it was safe, was because the Ark (Jesus) was already there! What a lesson!

When I was in college I used to play my guitar and sing at many conferences and gatherings. I took the old Simon and Garfunkle song "A bridge over troubled waters" and changed the words to make it communicate Jesus is the one saying, "Like a bridge over troubled waters, I will see you through." Actually, I've learned since then rather than being a bridge *over* troubled waters, He is the pathway *through* troubled waters. You see, Jesus doesn't elevate us above problems and difficulties (like a bridge); He is the pathway through tough times.

That's true for us as church. We face a daunting challenge. There are going to be problems and opposition galore. But if we keep our eyes on the Ark (Jesus), He will carry us through. My friend, it's also true of your life. Are you facing the dangerous current of some pressing problem? Do you feel as you if can go no further? You are right on the border of blessing but there is this huge, raging barrier in front of you. If Jesus tells you to move forward, go ahead and walk into the water—He'll be there.

Many of you know Coach Jon Groth and his wife Kitty. Jon is one of our young deacons and he coaches the Tyler Junior College baseball team. Jon wrote me a letter the other day about the value of stepping out in faith. He has given me permission to share a portion of his letter with you:

Dear Bro. David,

Awhile back you asked us to share testimonies about DTJ [Discover the Joy]. When the first commitments were made, Kitty and I talked and prayed about what our monthly gift to DTJ would be. We stepped out in faith and committed a certain amount monthly and have been faithful to honor that commitment. At that same time, I felt God prompt me to do more, although I couldn't quite grasp what at first. We had definitely made what we felt was a step of faith in our monthly gift towards the project. We were a family of 7, with 5 kids aged 9 and under. We've realized that you simply can't outgive God. (But it is fun and exciting to try sometimes!)

About that time, we had been praying about moving into a slightly larger home. We had bought our first home in Tyler when we had only three kids, but with 7 of us in there, it became apparent we might need to consider some more space. We also knew my salary was not going to change much, so finding much more space was going to be a financial challenge. I felt God prompt me at that time that this was the way to creatively give more to DTJ. So, we committed not to move until DTJ was over. We had decided to give a larger amount per month, committing to stay in our current home until the pledge time was over.

During DTJ, we discovered MORE joy as Kitty became pregnant with our sixth child. We prayed and felt it was time to earnestly begin a search for a home with some more space. We got our house ready to sell and our realtor advised us that our market time would likely be around 80-90 days. We prayerfully asked God to bring the people to our home to buy it so we'd be free to move. Without a sale, we couldn't move. Also, we prayed it would happen before the baby came. You've heard these stories before ... worldly common sense said it couldn't happen but God had other plans. Our house sold within 10 days of being on the market, which is a miracle in itself.

We searched and searched for a home that met our space needs, and our budget (which wasn't easy). We were able to move about a month before beautiful Lydia was born. When all was said and done, we found an older home that was more than we could have asked for. The topper is that we may have the best view of the new sanctuary that anyone does as our address is 1501 Dulse ... the grey house at the top of the hill overlooking our GABC campus!!

We have truly discovered the joy of committing to God's kingdom. I don't share any of this to lift us up, but your message this past week prompted me to share it with you. As you mentioned, we've been blessed to be a blessing and our hope and prayer is to prompt others to not be afraid to step out in faith if God's prompting them to do so.

We've got eight people, depending on God's faithfulness every day and I'm sharing with you, that He has been faithful in this process of discovering the joy to our family.

Sincerely Thankful in Christ,
Jon Groth

What faith! Are you on the border to blessing? Do you see the river? Are you willing to step forward and trust God to carry you through? It's all about faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Faith is coming to the edge of a cliff. It is reaching the very end of all you can know and see and hearing God say, "Take one more step." Faith is taking that next step and knowing either God will be there to catch you or He will teach you how to fly!

OUTLINE

IN ORDER FOR US TO MOVE FORWARD INTO A NEW FACILITY, OPPORTUNITY, CHALLENGE, WE MUST FIRST CROSS A RIVER OF IMPOSSIBILITY—HOW?

I. KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS (THE ARK) (3:1-4)

1. The Ark represents God's presence and power
2. Following Jesus always leads into uncharted territory
3. We must respect the holiness of God

WARNING: WE MUST BE SEEKING A BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR,
NOT A BEAUTIFUL BUILDING!

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of his holiness." *Psalm 29:2*

II. KEEP YOUR LIFE CLEAN (CONSECRATE) (5)

1. Get rid of your junk (sin)!

"But now, you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." *Colossians 3:8-10*

2. Get into God's Word!

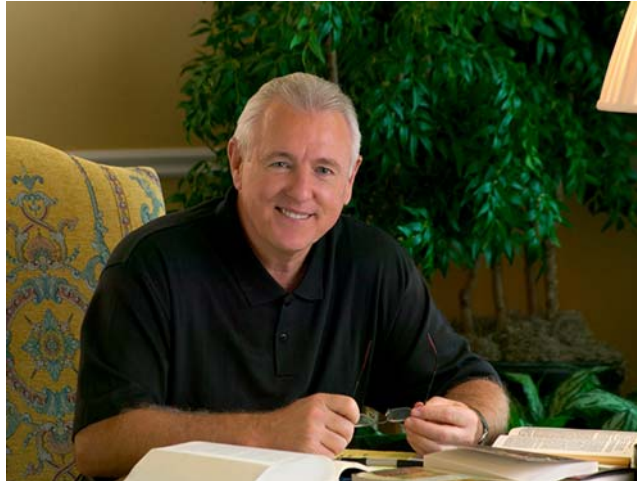
Jesus said, "Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you." *John 15:3*

3. Get on your knees in prayer and fasting!

If you remain in me and my word remains in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."
John 15:7

III. KEEP MOVING FORWARD INTO THE RIVER (3:14-17)

1. The Jordan is the borderline into blessing
2. You'll never know God's power until you step into the water
3. Jesus will be your pathway through the water



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes