

A Message from Joshua 3

The Crossing of the Jordan: Death and Resurrection with Christ

The book of Joshua, chapter 3, beginning at verse 6.

"And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people."

"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."

"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."

"And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites."

"Behold, the ark of the covenant of the LORD of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take ye twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off, and they shall stand upon an heap."

"And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people — as they that bear the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bear the ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest) — that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap, very far from the city of 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. 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."

Jordan and the Red Sea: A Different Character

What we have here is a very different character of things than at the crossing of the Red Sea. At the Red Sea there was no ark — what we had there, typically speaking, was Moses' rod of judgment. That speaks of Christ taking the judgment for us: His death and resurrection for us. The ark had not yet been made at that time.

But here, it is very evident that the ark goes into the water and the people pass over. The ark of the covenant, speaking of Christ, passes through the Jordan — the river of death. This is a with thing, whereas the Red Sea is for us. Christ's death and resurrection for us is the doctrine of Romans — He was raised for our justification. But the truth of being risen with Christ seems carefully kept from the book of Romans. It does go as far as Jordan, as it were, since we do have the text that we are dead with Christ. But Colossians takes us all the way through and on to Gilgal.

Here, then, they go into death with the ark of the covenant — through it. And so we say that this speaks of our death and resurrection with Christ. As Paul writes in Colossians: if you are dead with Christ (chapter 2), and if you be risen with Christ (chapter 3, verse 1). Dead with Christ. Risen with Christ. The ark enters the waters of death and makes a dry place, as it were, for the host to go over. They come up the other side, and the ark is brought up to the other side. It is our death and resurrection with Christ, and it brings us to the very point of entry into the land.

Gilgal, Circumcision, and the Passover

The crossing brings them not yet all the way into the land proper, but to that point where the circumcision takes place, the Passover is celebrated — apparently for the first time since the night of the Exodus — and they eat the old corn of the land. That old corn is the crop that was there from the previous year, the food indigenous to the land. It is therefore like the grain of wheat that has fallen to the ground and sprung up in resurrection, pointing to the resurrection of Christ as our food.

The Passover in Exodus 12 was eaten before deliverance — they had not yet been brought out. But here, on the far side of the Jordan, the Passover is eaten in the good of all that God has wrought. It has a fullness it did not have before. It is connected with the cessation of the manna, with the eating of the old corn of the land, and with the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt. The Passover receives a fresh character from everything God has accomplished. There is something of this in the difference between the way the Lord introduced the remembrance of Himself before the cross, and the fullness it has after His resurrection and glorification, when it is connected with the truth of the one body.

The truth of the one body is a resurrection truth. Those who have seen it most clearly have also understood Colossians and Ephesians most clearly, and have understood this type most clearly. Because the one body is a connection with Christ in resurrection and glory — and where is that truth unfolded like it is in the book of Ephesians? But in Ephesians we are seen seated in the heavenly places

in Christ Jesus.

The Ark Carried According to Order

There is a detail worth noting from Numbers 4. The instructions given there for carrying the ark specified that Aaron and his sons were first to go in, take down the veil of separation, cover the ark with it, and spread over it a cloth wholly of blue. So all that could be seen as the ark was carried was a cloth entirely of blue — a heavenly color. It is likely that on this occasion the ark was carried so, and what the Israelites saw, carried before them at a goodly distance of 2,000 cubits, was this blue object moving toward the brink of the Jordan.

The faithfulness with which the ark was to be carried is a matter of great seriousness. When David later attempted to bring the ark to Jerusalem on a new cart — an idea borrowed from the manner in which the Philistines had returned it — it cost the life of Uzzah, who put out his hand to steady it when the oxen stumbled. It was one thing for the Philistines, who had no such instructions, to do that. It was another thing altogether for the people of God, who had the word of God as a sufficient guide. When man's invention is used, human energy is required to steady it. David was greatly displeased, but he sought the Lord and read the instructions, and a chapter later he announced that none but the Levites should carry the ark. Then God helped them, and brought a blessing. God is very jealous for the ark of the covenant, because it signifies the presence of Jehovah among His people.

When the Levites carried the ark in the right order, it says in 1 Chronicles 15:26, "It came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams." Put that next to Uzzah's hand trying to steady the ark. When it is done in man's way, man's hand must do the steadying. When it is done in God's way, God Himself helps.

Pass Over — A Word of Altitude

There is something worth noticing even in the small words of our passage. In connection with crossing the Jordan, the language is consistently pass over — whereas in connection with the Red Sea, the language is pass through. There is a sense of altitude, a closeness to heaven, about this whole process from beginning to end. The ark, the people, the priests — all pass over.

As to the physical process, the ark stood on the priests' shoulders in the midst of the river while the people crossed, and only then came up from there. But the teaching of the passage is that the ark passed over before the people. Christ did all of this first — He went over. And yet, as the hymn says, when He died we died with Him. Buried in His grave we lay. We died with Him and were raised with Him. The type holds both thoughts together: the ark going before, and the people going through with the ark.

Joshua Magnified — The Piel Tense

Verse 7 contains something significant: "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel." Joshua is a type of our Lord Jesus as the leader of His own. And the word magnify here, as a check of the Hebrew concordance reveals, is in the Piel tense — a verbal form that carries intensive force. It is not a quiet or passing word. There is strong intensity in it. Joshua is to be magnified, and magnified greatly.

This is connected with the fact that it was not Moses who was appointed to bring Israel into the land. Moses is connected with the law. Whatever God's government may have involved regarding Moses personally, it was part of God's ways that Moses should not be the one to lead them into Canaan — because his name is connected with the law and the Mosaic system. Having died with Christ and been raised with Him, we are dead to the law. And so a new leader is brought before Israel: Joshua, a type of Christ. It is not law that brings us into the heavenly places. The magnifying of Moses has passed. Now the time has come for the magnifying of Joshua. There is no overlap: This day will I begin to magnify thee.

Those who cling to something Mosaic find themselves hindered from being heavenly. They are hindered from understanding what Gilgal means, what it means to be seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. In a sense, Moses and Joshua cannot be mixed. And the same holds true in doctrine: it is not the law that sanctifies. The sanctification that answers to this type is the circumcision of Christ, not the law. The law will indeed be written in the hearts of Israel under the new covenant in the millennium — but for the Christian, it is not the law but Christ who is written in the heart. These are distinct things, and they matter greatly.

The Practical Application — Return to Gilgal

It was remarked in the collective writings of J.N. Darby that if he saw a brother occupied with the nonsense that is found in the city, he could go to such a one and say that Christ had died for him — and, knowing he was a believer, that he had died with Christ. But he might take the occasion to remind him of the necessity to return to Gilgal, because there were lessons still to be learned in the cutting off of the flesh. Even in Darby's day, with what seems by today's standards a far quieter world, the abundance of what a Christian might call nonsense was already a concern. How much more so now.

The practical application of all of these things lies in the return to Gilgal, which Israel was to make over and over again. The Jordan and the circumcision are not merely about something that I have done wrongly and ought to reckon myself dead to — they are about me, what I am. God has put away in totality what I am in the first man. In Colossians 2, buried with Him in baptism — dead and gone. That is necessary for the soul to realize what it means to be in the heavenly places, and to understand the

character of the conflict spoken of in Ephesians 6, which is of a different order entirely from the wilderness.

The reason for the failure in Canaan that we see in Judges — the weeping at Bochim in chapter 2, which reflects the condition of Christendom — is a refusal to be heavenly, a failure to apply practically the truth of the Jordan and the circumcision of Christ. What the Lord desires to deal with at Gilgal is not just particular sins I have committed, but what I am. The body of the flesh is cut off, as Colossians 2 says — the whole of it. That is the necessary ground for victory in the heavenly conflict. And those who grasp the truth of the one body most clearly are the ones who have understood Colossians and Ephesians most clearly, and understood this type most clearly.

The Wilderness by the Way

One further word deserves mention. The wilderness is not part of God's purpose — it came in by the way. As it is shown in the 3rd, 6th, and 15th chapters of Exodus, God's purpose was to bring Israel out and bring them in. The wilderness came in between as part of His ways with them — to prove them, to teach them what the flesh was and what He was. We learn a great deal about ourselves in the wilderness, and we learn what God is for us there.

But God's purpose, as it were, is as if they went through the Red Sea, right on to the Jordan, up and out, and straight to Gilgal, and then into the land. The wilderness comes in by the way. This means that the reproach of Egypt is not rolled away at Sinai, nor through forty years in the wilderness — that connection with Egypt clung all the way through. It is only when they come through the Red Sea, through the Jordan, and up to Gilgal that the reproach of Egypt is finally rolled away. The two crossings coalesce — they form one whole redemption. In experience we separate them, but in God's purpose they are one.

May the Lord help us to apprehend more deeply what it means to be seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and to walk accordingly.