

Sermon Brief

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August 19, 2012

Text: Joshua 3:1-17

Title: “Go For The Gold!”

Subject: God miraculously ushers Israel into the long-awaited Promised Land.

Complement: Israel must follow God by faith and obedience to enter in.

Textual Idea: The Israelites are ushered miraculously by God into the long-awaited Promised Land through faith and obedience.

Sermon Idea: Seize your “Jordan River” moment by setting your GPS on God.

Interrogative: Are you following the ark?

Key word/Transitional sentence: We’re all going to leave some kind of legacy – what will yours be?

Key Words:

1. “Cross Over” - Understand the magnitude of your legacy.
2. “Ark” – Pursuing a godly legacy requires a vision of and an active faith in God.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that their lives are going to leave a legacy of some kind depending on their choices now.

What do I want people to do? I want people to get serious about their commitment to following Jesus.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need for a purposeful life that honors God.

“Go For The Gold!”

Joshua 3:1-17

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Seize your “Jordan River” moment by setting your GPS on God.

1. “Cross Over” - Understand the magnitude of your legacy.
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Well...the Olympics are over...good thing because I was close to dying by the end with all those late nights! What fun and inspiration! Now there were many great stories and athletes but I think we can probably all agree that two athletes in particular stood out from all the others. Guesses? Okay, well my choices are first of all this character (**LCD**) **Usain Bolt the fastest man in the world!** What a nut he is! He’s like the new Muhammad Ali - prideful and yet endearing at the same time! What struck me is that for years he has been saying that he wants to be a legend and after winning three more gold medals at these games – in world record times – he is certainly a track legend. The other guy that stands out to me is this American hero (**LCD**), of course, **Michael Phelps**. Similar to Bolt, he set a high goal for himself – to be the greatest Olympian ever – and now he is with his staggering total of 19 gold and 3 bronze medals over 4 Olympiads. “Legend,” “Greatest Olympian Ever” – tremendous legacies. These guys won’t be quickly forgotten.

On the other hand, during my Bible reading this week, I came across an eerie verse. I was reading about one of the kings of Judah, Jehoram, and look at what I read, (**LCD**) **“Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one’s regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.”** ‘To no one’s regret,’ Ouch! That’s a far cry from ‘legend!’ We all are going to leave some kind of a legacy behind us. And that legacy will be largely a product of decisions that we make at key junctures in our lives – we’ll call them “Jordan River” moments. Maybe you’re deciding about a relationship you want to pursue – that’s a “Jordan River” moment because the results of that decision will be huge down the road. Maybe you’re deciding about a new job or home or ministry – “Jordan River” moment. Our choices in these kinds of places have massive, legacy determining impact. How can we choose well at these moments? I want us to think about the “Jordan River” moments that we may be facing right now in our own lives and our church’s life as we look at a literal “Jordan River” moment this morning. Turn with me to Joshua chapter three and we’re going to see how Israel fares when confronted with a major obstacle - the literal Jordan River raging right in front of them. We last left off with the two spies reporting to Joshua that the Canaanites are melting in fear at the thought of the two million plus Israelites coming into their land. With this encouragement, we pick up with chapter three.

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ 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. ⁴ 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.”

Okay, let’s re-orient ourselves with a map (**LCD**). The Israelites are here in the cozy acacia grove known as Shittim; and they leave that sweet spot to travel seven miles or so to the Jordan River. Notice that they leave ‘early in the morning’ – they’re actually ready and seemingly anxious to go. They should be – this is their last night of wilderness wandering – it’s finally Promised Land time! From Genesis to this chapter, the great expectation has been Israel, God’s people, inheriting the land and now here it is!

After three days of preparations at the Jordan River, the orders finally go out: follow the ark – but keep your distance. What’s up with that? First of all, if you’ve seen “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” then you’ve seen a replica of the (**LCD**) ark. It was a gold-covered box with golden cherubim over it and it was where the Lord would meet with His people. **Inside the ark (LCD)**, were three things: the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s budded staff and a bowl of manna – God’s word, God’s leadership and God’s provision. All that His people need to live with and for Him. **Following the ark** is a call for Israel (**LCD**) to obey God’s word, submit to His leadership through His chosen leader and believe in God’s provision of their needs. Same with us – following God means walking wholeheartedly in these three areas. How are we doing?

The people are also told to keep a distance of 1000 yards between them and the ark. That translates to a little over half a mile! That is the distance from here to Cottage Grove Road. That’s a long way! Try to **picture (LCD) the nation** watching this. Now they needed to do this so that everyone could clearly see the way that the Lord wanted them to go. The Lord Himself is showing them the way. Remember Proverbs 3:5-6, (**LCD**) **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”**

But there is more to it than just guidance – verse 5:

⁵ Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.”

The word here for consecrate, (**LCD**) **qadash**, is an important Old Testament word that carries the idea of being dedicated to something or someone. We did a baby dedication this morning. That was a consecration – these parents are committing themselves completely, setting their lives and their energy apart, for the purpose of raising this child. What are you consecrated to? What gets your focus, your attention, your dedication – what are you set aside to focus upon? If we want to leave a godly legacy, if we want to cross our “Jordan River” moments and inherit all God has for us, we need to be set apart to Him. Tremper Longman adds this, (**LCD**) **“The acts of consecration (like confession) remove the barriers to God’s power and to fellowship, and so prepare our hearts to receive God’s grace; they build our faith so we will put our feet in the water, cross over, and go up against the enemy.”** Our “Jordan River” moments – should I say ‘yes’ or ‘no’

to that drink, to that woman in the office, to that offer of a big job with long hours, to that TV show with the compromised values – our “Jordan River” moments decide our legacy.

There is another reason the Israelites need to consecrate themselves – check this out, (LCD) ***“But that Yahweh will soon do marvels ‘among you’ promises the close proximity of his holy presence, and that puts sinful Israel at great risk. The threat is that ‘the Lord will break out against them’ – that his holiness will ravage them.”***

Remember that this is the Old Testament, before Christ bore the full brunt of the wrath of a holy God on the cross, so the only way a holy God could be in the presence of these unholy people is if they got right with him. Consecration meant that they spent the night before crossing the Jordan in confession, washing their clothes, and abstaining from sexual relations. Instead of sharpening swords and filling food stores, they’re preparing spiritually. Why – Zechariah tells us, (LCD) ***“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”*** The battle to cross the Jordan and claim the Promised Land is ultimately a spiritual one. It will require consecration – spiritual readiness. The battle is the Lord’s and the inheritance is ours through consecration – being all His. And one person who is consecrated and ready to move forward is Joshua. Verse 6:

⁶ Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them. ⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

Look down at verse 15 for a moment...the Jordan is at flood stage – it’s raging! The river normally floods a lower level but in the spring, late March/early April, the snow melts on Mount Hermon and the spring rains come causing the river to swell from the normal depth of 3-10 feet to as much as 150 feet deep in some spots! Can you imagine the priests struggling to walk into this surging flow on muddy, sinking ground with this heavy, golden box? I could just see the ark going floating away down the river. This is crazy...but instead of turning back, Joshua urges them to go forward. Verse 9:

⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. ¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap. ”

At this “Jordan River,” legacy forming, impossible moment, Joshua speaks the word of the Lord – and not just any Lord – he calls Him ‘the living God.’ Yes you will have to go up against seven stronger tribes of people – and even more eventually – but Yahweh, Your God, is what? The ‘living God’ who is, verse 11 and 13, ‘the Lord of all the earth.’ He is the one true God and He is about to prove that to all the peoples who worship false

gods in Canaan. In the Ancient Near East, to prove if someone's words were true or not, you would throw them into a river. If they survived, then they would be proved right. Yahweh, through the ark, going into the river and coming out would show that His claims are true. He is who He says He is. Like Jesus' resurrection for us – it is the solid, concrete proof that Jesus is who He said He was – Lord – the same thing we read of Israel's God in verse 13. The word 'lord' appears twice but it is two different words. **(LCD) When you see LORD in all caps, the Hebrew word is Yahweh – the covenant name of Israel's God. When you see Lord with only the L capitalized, it is the word Adonai which means ruler, owner, master.** The bottomline – Yahweh rules! The crossing of the Jordan is going to serve to uphold God's reputation as God. And don't miss that it all depends on what? The people of God obeying His commands! Obedience is key! God's reputation is staked on His people believing His Word and staking their lives on it!

There is a handout in your bulletin this morning that contains "20 Cans of Success." It is a list of promises from God's Word that we all inherit as believers in Christ. I urge you to go over it prayerfully, even each day, believe God's Word and begin walking in the freedom of the Promised Land of Gods' Spirit. The result of this faith and obedience? God will be glorified – His reputation enhanced throughout the world. Just like in our passage this morning, verse 14:

¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ 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 specific thing had to happen for God to be glorified in this passage? The **priests (LCD)** had to step into the water BEFORE God worked! How scary would that have been? We've seen what happens when the ark slips and someone tries to uphold it – death! What if they slip? Even still, they needed to step in first. That is how faith works. We hear God and then He waits to act until we step out believing that God has power to do what He has promised. Are you missing your "Jordan River" moments, missing seeing God do amazing things among you because you're waiting for some sure-fire sign or some total assurance that you'll be okay? That's NOT how it works! In his stirring book, "Seizing Your Divine Moments," Erwin McManus shares this insight, **(LCD) "Our wealth and abundance of human resources have positioned us to accept a paradigm that provision precedes vision. This has been the foundation of building no-risk faith."** Now I have to be honest here – I've been guilty of a no-risk faith and we as a church have been guilty of it too. We wait until all our ducks are in order before we move – even when God has been crystal clear about what to do. This is where I tend to miss my "Jordan River" moments – too afraid to risk.

Fortunately, the new generation of Israelites don't miss their moment because the priests step in – and the water piled up in attention to the presence of its master and ruler! They pile up 16 miles away (LCD) in the **town of Adam**. Wow! Now I don't have time to get into all the scientific issues here – the Scriptures present this as an absolutely awesome God miracle and that is what it was. Even more amazing is that the muddy ground is dry – twice we read that. It has been estimated that it probably took the two million plus people about half a day to cross over. Imagine what they felt?! It's awesome to experience the power of God in our lives – and that is what He wants for each of us. So the great promise to Abraham 600 years earlier is fulfilled – Israel walks into the Promised Land! Wow!

What about us? Well I'd like to make two summary points that zero in on the two words that show up the most in this chapter as well as chapter four which we'll look at next week. We see the first word, (LCD) **'abar in Joshua 3 and 4, 22 times!** Now you can't see that in our English bibles because it is translated Cross, Pass On, Enter, Went Through, Traveled, Carry, Over, Went Across, etc... But this is an unusual word - *“This verb emphasizes the decisive nature of this moment in the history of the Hebrew people...never used to describe the passage through the waters of the Red Sea...connotes something with tremendous epic significance... it implies crossing over a boundary...”* This is a boundary event for Israel. Her legacy is being defined right here. So this word gives us our first summary point, (LCD) **“Cross Over” - Understand the magnitude of your legacy.** It is crucial that you understand how huge your life is. No one lives in a vacuum. You're going to leave a legacy – what will it be? If Usain Bolt and Michael Phelps can dedicate years and years of sacrifice in order to achieve temporal, earthly legacies, we should no doubt do at least as much.

What that means is that we need a vision to pursue. Like the (LCD) **gold medal** was a vision of pursuit for Bolt and Phelps, so we need a worthy vision and our second common word gives us that – (LCD) ark. The word 'ark' shows up 17 times between chapters 3 and 4. Now it is not really the golden ark itself that we are to pursue but what is symbolized – the very presence of a holy God. You see, the decision we make in our “Jordan River” moment will be directly related to our vision. If we have our eyes fixed on Jesus, we'll choose the path that He is on. If we have our eyes fixed on worldly pursuits, we'll most likely miss our moment to see God do amazing things among us. The second summary point then is (LCD) **“Ark” – Pursuing a godly legacy requires a vision of and an active faith in God.**

But here is where I really want you to pay attention. I believe that in a church like ours, most of us aren't in the middle of making really horrible choices or setting our eyes on nasty, nasty things...and that could be a bigger problem. Stephen Furtick has said this, (LCD) **“Most believers aren't in imminent danger of ruining their lives. They're facing a danger that's far greater – wasting them.”** He goes on to talk about the same thing Erwin McManus speaks of - a casual, no-risk faith that is too comfortable, that doesn't even need God. Ask yourself, “What am I pursuing right now that can't be done unless God shows up in a powerful way?” I'm talking about the gray raindrops on the Pray for Reign sign. If you can't answer that, then you've either missed your “Jordan River”

moment or your vision is impaired by something a lot lower on the eternal scale than the purposes of the kingdom of God. We need to cross the Jordans of our lives with our eyes on Jesus and we do that by keeping our focus on those three things in the ark: **(LCD) obeying God’s Word, submitting to His leadership and trusting in His provision.**

Back in 1987, I thought I had it made. I was in my first year at Liberty Mutual in New Hampshire, was engaged to Diane, had a car and an apartment, had a nice volunteer ministry on a college campus – all set. Then I had a “Jordan River” moment – Diane and I were asked by my leadership to consider moving to Hartford, CT to help start a ministry there. “But I’m all set here! What if I can’t find a job, I mean I have less than a year’s experience!” I figured it didn’t hurt to check it out so I came down one May day to look for work. That morning, I was having a quiet time in Psalm 107 **(LCD)** and I read this, **(LCD)** verse 7, “He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.” Wow...perfect timing or coincidence? I prayed over that verse, listened to God, dated it and said, “Okay, I’m going to walk in confidence that You’re leading me Lord.” I only had one thing set up – Chas DeSiena was working at The Hartford and had me come in to do a job application – but I knew it was probably going nowhere. After that, it was not even 10am and I had no other leads. I prayed. Then I remembered that I had worked with a guy from The Travelers a few months earlier. I called him, “Hey Lon, remember me? Andre from Liberty Mutual? Yeah...I’m in the lobby looking to move to Hartford. Can you help?” Lon says, “Hold on, let me ask my boss.” A few moments later, “Hey Andre, I’m coming down to get you. My boss wants to talk to you.” Ends up that the guy who did my job at The Travelers had died two weeks earlier! I got hired within the week with almost a 50% pay raise! Wow! What I didn’t know then was that my legacy was here at Wintonbury...I didn’t focus on making a great legacy, I focused on the ark – the Lord – and He guided me.

My main point this morning is this **(LCD)**, ***Seize your “Jordan River” moment by setting your GPS on God. That*** is what I pray for us all. Maybe a better way of putting it is how my wife said it to me, **(LCD)** ***“When the ark is in place, the river is not an issue.”*** I like that better. Pray for Reign friends – go for the gold! Next week, I want to spend time hearing your Green Leaf stories so come prepared to do that, okay?!