



Have you ever started a project around your house with great enthusiasm, and then looking back you wished that you had never tried to do it yourself? I remember landscaping the front yard of our first house. We hired some guys to put in our sidewalk and a patio and a wall and a gate. But I was determined to build a brick planter in front of this wall and put rose bushes in it.

Could it really be that difficult? I bought some bricks and some sacks of mortar mix. I dumped the 50 lb. bag of mix in a wheelbarrow, added some water, stirred, and then scooped the mix into a trench I had dug. I worked a few hours on Saturday afternoons. I did a course and then another course on top. Then it rained and I couldn't work for a while. But I noticed something that shouldn't have been happening. My partially finished wall was wavy. I talked to a friend and he asked me how deep my footings were. I answered him with a question, "What is a footing?"

Has there ever been a time when you wished that someone had told you, "Don't do this yourself." Most of us have likely at one time owned a do-it-yourself manual. When I look back over some things that I have tried in my life, I wish I would have had a don't-do-it-yourself manual that gave all the reasons why I shouldn't do it myself! Do you want to know what happened to my half-built wavy planter? I had to travel one week on business and when I got home, there was a big red bow on my planter. My wife had hired someone to come in and fix what I had messed up by doing it myself.

Actually, there is a best-seller out there that could be called a don't-do-it-yourself manual. You may own a copy and not even know it. The don't-do-it-yourself manual has another name—the Bible. It's a walk-by-faith manual.

As we continue our study in Joshua we see that God puts the Israelites in positions where they just can't do it themselves. We see obstacle after obstacle come their way, and to them they must have felt like children going up against giants. Have you ever felt like a child going up against a giant when you look out at the giant obstacles you face? Did you feel like this?

To even stand in the same ring as our obstacles requires faith. As we saw in Joshua chapter 1, when God told them to be strong and courageous, he was saying trust me. Read your don't-do-it-yourself manual. Trust in my promises. Trust in my Presence. Trust in my Power. Trust in my Word. Trust in my Leading. Remember he told them to rise up. And faith implies obedience

too. We are to follow. Faith implies a pilgrimage of some kind; a journey, a venture of faith that moves us from what is natural and familiar to what is unfamiliar. Faith implies that with God anything is possible.

Then there is grace. Grace is the fuel our Big God uses to fan this flame of faith. Grace empowers us to conclude, "I can't do it. God, only you can do it. Only you can defy the limitations around me. And only by your grace do you draw me closer for the journey and teach me all kinds of things, expected and unexpected."

What is our big idea this morning? It's right out of Joshua 3-4. It's this: We can have confidence that God will lead us through obstacles with God's power and presence. Let's read through this story and learn what it has to say to us about building our confidence in God.

If you remember Joshua is the new leader of about two million Israelites, who after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness are camped out just east of the Jordan River waiting further instruction before they cross over and begin to claim the land that was promised them. They were remembering a promise that was made to their ancestor Abraham that was recorded back in Genesis 12. Here is where Mark left off last week. The Israelites are camping at a place about five miles east of the Jordan River.

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over (Josh. 3:1).

We can take a look at this map and get a sense of what is about to happen. They set out from where they were camped and went five miles west to the eastern shore of the Jordan River. They were about five miles upstream from the Dead Sea where the Jordan dumps into. And eventually after the crossing they would set up camp in a place called Gilgal just outside the city of Jericho where Rahab and her family lived. Now we will see how God builds their confidence for the obstacles ahead.

We Will have Confidence in God When We Prepare by Wanting to be Right with God

For the Israelites it was just about time for war. Most military leaders would say, "Sharpen your swords, men. Polish your shields." Not this commander. They were preparing for a battle all right, but in this battle God was in charge.

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 Levitical priests 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 two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it" (verses 2-4).

He is saying, don't go near it because it is holy. Stay 1000 yards away from it. Why would the Lord want to be so far out in front? So that all the people could see what was about to happen. So that the people's confidence would grow, because God was making it so clear that this is God himself working, not a man in his flesh. And God was going to take them to places they had never been before.

Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." 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. 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. 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'" (verses 5-7).

So here, God speaks to Joshua for the first time since Joshua 1:1-9. These words are a fulfillment of those in chapter 1. Literally "so they may know and experience that I am with you, Joshua." The writer is emphasizing the suspense of this great story. So we are left with the priests reaching the edge, taking a deep breath and slowly wading into the Jordan while balancing the ark. But we are forced into a place of suspense. What happens next isn't mentioned until verse 13. Now, the entire nation of Israel watched for what would happen next, and I'll bet some curious enemy spies hid out in the thicket on the western shore of the Jordan, watching what was unfolding as well so they could report back to Jericho.

Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. 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. See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 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" (verses 9-13).

The whole chapter builds to what is being described in verse 13. I love this. It isn't saying that the river will be blocked in the sense that the clogged river will overflow upstream like water would, finding the path of least resistance and gravity. No, it is saying

that the water would stand up in a heap. God was about to intervene and defy natural laws and cause water to stand up in a heap upstream. So we saw earlier in chapter 3 that it was God's presence that grew their confidence; now they were about to see God's power grow their confidence.

As they reflect on the fact that they couldn't do this themselves, then they embrace the fact that it is only this God of grace that can tame that river obstacle. That it is only this God of grace that can tame this Canaanite obstacle. And to make it more personal to us as Christians, if this God of grace was willing to go all the way and not hold back giving his Son, wouldn't his grace be sufficient to grow our confidence and protect us and get us through the raging rivers of fear and doubt, discouragement and worry about the unknown?

When we prepare, when we wait in anticipation, when we get ourselves in tune with God's Word, when we listen to what God says, when we listen to God's people, we are preparing. When we have ears to hear, we gain spiritual wisdom to discern what God is doing and align to it. Joshua is telling us when we prepare to meet God, we will meet God. We will gain the confidence to follow wherever God is calling no matter how unfamiliar it is, no matter the obstacle, and no matter how silly from the world's perspective it may seem.

We Will Have Confidence in God When We Follow by Taking the Next Step of Faith to Cross Over

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 carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 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 (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho (verses 14-16).

If you look in an atlas you would see that the town called Adam was about 18 miles north of where they were. The water stopped flowing 18 miles upstream.

The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground (v. 17).

What do you think these Israelites were struggling with before they stepped into the riverbed? How did their lack of confidence express itself? If their confidence in God were to grow, what would we see more of? What would we see less of? How about us?

Does anybody here ever wrestle with worry? Does anybody here ever get anxious? Fear is a universal experience. There was an

article in *The New York Times* that says the scientists working on the human genome project have identified what they call “the worry gene.” I’m not making this up. It’s the SLC 684 gene on chromosome 17q12. People who have the short version of that gene, they say, are especially prone to worry. Now that I’m telling you this, how many of you are now worrying that you have the short version of the worry gene?

Have you been thinking about worry and anxiety a lot these days? When I wake up in the morning, sometimes I’m tempted to be overwhelmed by all the stuff I think I’ve got to do. I sit at my desk and think about all the problems I don’t know how to solve and all of the really important outcomes I cannot control—my kids, my family, my relationships, the ministry I’m a part of—and sometimes, to tell you the truth, I had a moment this week when Jesus seemed to whisper to me, “Dan, you and I are going to walk through this deal together.”

Things around you can be swirling out of your control, but there’s this inner reality: God is enough. He really is. I think this is why the Apostle Paul said, I can do all things. I can sit in a prison cell and face anything life has to throw at me though him who gives me strength—through Jesus. Nobody else can give this sort of peace to us. My circumstances or my natural abilities—they cannot give us this peace. This peace comes from God. He is saying, “I am bigger than your problems. I am bigger than your failures. I am bigger than your regrets, many though they may be. I am bigger than your sin and guilt. If you will let me, if you will try me, if you will open the door of your heart, I will come into your life and I will be your forgiver, and I will be your strength, I will grow your confidence in me.”

Only Jesus makes this confident life possible because it’s on the cross that we see the God who is bigger than our sin, bigger than our guilt, and bigger than our regret. When we reflect on that empty cross, that empty tomb that Jesus put to shame, we see our God who is bigger than death itself leading us. And it’s right for us to remember this. Sometimes all we can do in tough times is just remember that the God who is bigger than death itself is leading us. When the present seems spinning out of control, God is telling us to remember the past.

These Israelites, when they stepped into the riverbed and began to walk across, they walked on dry ground. That is evidence of a God bigger than death at work. Prepare, follow, and finally, remember.

We Will Have Confidence in God When We Remember What God has Done and Proclaim It to the Next Generation

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you

and put them down at the place where you stay tonight” (Josh. 4:1-3).

Why 12 stones? So that the whole nation of 12 tribes would remember what God did for us. I love that “where you will stay at night” is your “place of rest.” This God of grace had fueled their faith and they had reached the land promised to their ancestors.

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever” (verses 4-7).

The idea of stones is permanence; a memorial is permanence. The people of Israel were to remember forever what their God did for them and grow in confidence from generation to generation.

So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day (verses 8-9).

As we reflect on this passage we can see how it is similar to another Old Testament event. Joshua leading them across the Jordan into the Promised Land makes us think of Moses leading the Hebrew people across the parted Red Sea; how they prepared to see God do amazing things while eating the first Passover supper. How the Israelites prepared to see God do amazing things by consecrating themselves. How those ancient Hebrews and these Israelites had to trust that God was leading, and that God would have to do an amazing thing to pull this off, and they would both have to take steps of faith and follow.

Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, ready for battle, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. About forty thousand armed for battle crossed

over before the Lord to the plains of Jericho for war (verses 10-13).

Remember the reasons for this crossing. First, out of obedience they were to step out in faith to claim their inheritance from God. And second, they were to get in a position for battle. If we remember from chapter 1, the tribes of Ruben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh were called Transjordan tribes. That meant that their inherited land was actually on the east side of the Jordan River, what is known as modern-day Jordan. The half-tribe of Manasseh was half of Joseph's inheritance broken out between his two sons—Manasseh mostly on the east side and Ephraim on the west side. Manasseh had promised to send across their fighting men but were allowed to leave their families at home and safe, east of the Jordan River.

That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan." So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord. 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.

On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over (verses 14-23).

This was all about what parents should tell their children. Be confident, children. Remember that the Israelites crossed on dry land. The whole world should know.

He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God" (v. 24).

There is a value in publicly remembering what God has done. There is a value in proclaiming it to the next generation. There is value in tying our present-day challenges to the challenges that others faced with success. Telling of the greatness of God to others increases our confidence. And in a few minutes we are going to tell of the greatness of God and build a visual monument of our own as a reminder of what God has done in our lives so that we can all grow in our confidence in God.

What hit me about Joshua was that his God was big. So I ask myself, "Do I live with a big God or a shrunken God?" If I wake up in the morning and go through the day with a shrunken God, there are consequences. I will live in a constant state of fear and anxiety because everything depends on me. My mood will be governed by whatever circumstances hit me that day. If I live with a shrunken God, I will find it unnatural to pray when I have a need, because to be honest, I'm not really sure that God makes a difference and that prayer matters. If I live with a shrunken God, I will become a slave to whatever other people think of me, because I don't live in the security of a big God's acceptance of me. If I live with a shrunken God, I am praying without faith, worshiping without any awe or wonder, serving without joy, and suffering without hope. Whatever our need, God is bigger. Whatever our weakness, God is stronger.

Robert Wilson was a linguistics professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. He learned more than 45 languages in his quest to understand the scriptures better. But his students who knew him knew that his critiques were not so much about how accurate his students translated words, or how impressive their scholarship was, or how much charisma they showed. Wilson said, "When my boys come back to visit, I come to see if they are big-godders or little-godders. Then I know what their ministry will be."

The writer of Joshua poses this question for me and for you: How big is your God? One who is greater than any obstacle has come and therefore we can be strong and courageous. We don't have to be afraid. We can be confident.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1423-3S