

In 1870... a blunder... obvious to us today... was made by an American bishop. ...While visiting a small Bible college and staying at the home of the president... the bishop expressed his firm conviction... that the Bible predicted that nothing new could be invented. ... The president found himself in immediate disagreement with the esteemed bishop... So the president offered his own firm conviction... *"I believe in 50 years men will be able to fly just like birds."* ... Well this just shocked the bishop... almost beyond words. ... Eventually... though... The bishop managed to spit out a rebuke saying... *"Flight is only for the angels. I beg you not to repeat your suggestion lest you be guilty of blasphemy."*

What is ironic about this story... is that the visiting bishop... the man who thought that to speak of flying was to commit blasphemy... was none other than Milton Wright. ... Bishop Milton Wright had two sons - Orville and Wilbur Wright... who in spite of their fathers skepticism... they went on to achieve the first ever human flight at Kitty Hawk North Carolina.

That story... and the Bible passage that we come to this morning in the Book of Joshua... have me begin with this exhortation: "May you and I do great things for the Lord... in spite of the obstacles we might face along the way. ... One of our biggest obstacles is our very limited and small thinking.

In the middle of our passage of study... Joshua 3:10... we find this short phrase... *"Here is how you shall know that the Living God is among you..."*

The object of today's text is to impress us with the adequacy of God... to drill into us... that *God* is not merely a three-letter word of our Christian

jargon. God is not merely the honorary leader of “Club, Living Water.” The God we have come here today to worship is the living God... Who works... and intervenes... and comes... and saves... and rescues... and counsels His people in all their perplexities.... He is indeed 'the Living God... the Lord of all the earth' ... as our text declares. ... He is not a mere Little League deity.

My challenge to you... as we study this text... will be to renounce any tendency you have to 'punify' God... any tendency to carve Him down to your own stature... any tendency we have... to limit Him to our possibilities.

Some of us in this room face enormous personal challenges in life right now... and if you don't... I can guarantee that there is a looming giant just around your corner. ... If you are a believer... God has brought you to Canaan... and it is a land filled with giants. ... there are battles to be fought. There are victories to win. ... And instead of limiting God to our possibilities... we must let God be Who He really is... and watch Him unleash His surprising power in our circumstances.

The title of this morning's message is “The Only Way to Experience the Power of God.” ... Now that may sound like a rather audacious title... but we are dealing with an awesome passage that has very powerful parallels to the Christian life today. I have picked out six principles... or parallels... from this narrative... that I am excited to show you... because I truly think that they are the only way to experience the power of God. And we need the very power of God in our challenges. ... So let's now read today's passage in it's entirety... and then come back and break it down.

Joshua 3:7-17

The first principle from our passage this morning... concerns itself with verse 7... where God promises to magnify Joshua in the eyes of almost 3 million Jews. The Lord told Joshua how they would make the crossing... and explained to Joshua that this miracle would magnify or **exalt** him as the leader of the people. It was time to establish Joshua's credentials as God's representative to guide Israel. ... The chief minister in Israel was Joshua. He had taken Moses' place and needed respect for his position and God promised to provide that respect.

Joshua 3:7

Our first principle is especially for handling the spiritual leadership challenges. ... God has called so many of us to exercise some form of spiritual leadership... either in the church... or in the home... or even in bringing the Gospel to a friend. ... If you have ever been called to lead an activity at church... or been given a responsibility for some ministry... this is for you. You want to experience the power of God in it... don't you...?

With any form of spiritual leadership – there is never any need to exalt ourselves. ... God will do the magnifying! ... And he will do it for one reason. ... The purpose of Joshua's exalting was so that he could promote the work of the Lord. (Which he does...)

Joshua needed the respect of people so they would follow his directions about crossing the Jordan. The people had followed Moses... once they saw that he was the God's chosen leader. ... But Moses is now dead... and

they need to trust and respect Joshua. ... The exalting of Joshua will take care of that need.

Often leaders do not wait for the Lord to exalt them. ... they will promote themselves. ... "*I am the leader of such and such.*" ... And most of this self-exalting... is not to promote the work of the Lord... but to promote the person who exalts himself. Allow God to exalt you... If and when He does... then... promote the work of the Lord.

Both Moses and Joshua had received their *authority* from the Lord before these miracle crossings occurred. Their authority came first... and then came their stature in the people's esteem.... It takes both God's authority and stature in the eyes of those being led... to exercise effective spiritual leadership. ...God will do both for His servants.

But... you know... Joshua... himself... needed the assurance of God's presence with him. Not only was it crucial for the Israelites to know this... but Joshua also needed to be secure in his position. He needed to have confidence from God.

Some of you may not initially understand why authentication of leadership is so important. But it is why the elders of Living Water from time to time will ask a deacon... or a deaconess... or a ministry head... "Do you feel called by God to this ministry...? Why...? What evidence do you have...?" When ministry gets tough... and it will always have its challenges... we need to know God has called us to be in it. It is an anchor for remaining steady through difficult times.

I would have thrown in the towel YEARS AGO... long before now... but a strong sense of call has kept me going through the times of toughest challenges. ... This whole matter intrigued me when I was working on my doctorate... so I decided to do my dissertation on the strength of call pastors have to ministry... and how it helps them. ... Imagine my dismay to discover how many pastors of likeminded churches do not even believe there is such a thing as a call... or are not sure they have received a call... yet they are in the pastorate.

Part of my sense of call came as I went through the ordination process. After I obtained a Master of Divinity Degree in Seminary... and after I had been a pastor for 5 years... I submitted myself to the ordination process. It was a series of very intensive evaluations by fellow pastors and missionaries and denominational leaders. I wrote papers... and stood before two committees for several hours to answer a lot of questions about my beliefs... understanding of Scripture... how I would handle various situations of ministry... personal life... and why I thought I was called. Eventually the council came to a consensus of their belief that I am one of the pastors Paul wrote about in Philippians 4:11 – one who holds the office of pastor and who God has been given to the church Universal.

This summer... our church will engage in an ordination process for two candidates. Josh Harpole will be coming home from Colombia. God has been using Josh mightily is establishing a local church through our mission, Colombia Grace Foundation. Two months ago... when I was in Colombia... I got to experience... first hand... a little of the impact Josh, Mike, and Fernando are having NOT ONLY with their local congregation... but an entire association of churches in the Cartagena region of Colombia.

They have ... and ARE influencing many pastors to use the Bible in their preaching... and to turn from legalism to grace. I spoke with pastors down there who Mike and Josh have influenced... and who are now spreading similar influence to many others.

I would love to do for Josh... what had been done for me... and what I think we see God doing in our passage this morning for Joshua – authentication of leadership authority from God... and status before the people in Colombia with whom he is having an impact.

But Josh is only one of two candidates we will be evaluating this summer. At the same time we will also be evaluating Lyman Flenner. Lyman has been serving as a chaplain to emergency first responders in Gillcrest. They want to bring Lyman into a full-time position of doing this... but such a position requires that the person be ordained. So we will have the privilege of being involved in – not ONE – but TWO - ordinations this summer.

(LISTEN) Every person involved in ministry needs to know they have been called by God. Otherwise the first sign of difficulty... will be the message for so many... that it is time to go... when it may not be. If you have a leadership role in the church of any kind... you don't need to be ordained... but you do need an authentication of leadership. Ask God to give you a strong sense of His calling. (Look for evidence where other believers have been built up in their faith through your ministry... and along with that... look to see if you have a subjective sense of joy in your particular ministry.)

The only way to experience the power of God is #1 – Let God exult you. Examine His call for you. Be confident in it. #2... Look at verse 8...

Joshua 3:8

A few verses later... we learn that when the priests' feet entered the Jordan... that was the instant God divided the Jordan. ... I want you to see here... though... that... initially they were only required to get their feet wet. ... The priests were told to stand still... once their feet were in it. They are not told to march into the river and just keep marching. “*Step into the water... and momentarily stand still...*” In other words – “*Just get your feet wet...*”

Many in church are not willing to get their feet wet in any venture of service. They are unwilling to step out into the stream by faith... and so a multitude of churches sit and do nothing... but go through the motions. ... Stepping out by faith does not have to be reckless. ... But there does need to be motion / activity. ... The priests were told to “*stand still*” in the Jordan once their feet were in it. ... God did not tell the priests to walk into the Jordan until they drowned or got the ark submerged. ... Churches are not required to be foolish and get in trouble when doing a work for God. ... What they have to do is show some faith — get moving in the direction that you know God wants you to go. ... Walk into the water. ... GET YOUR FEET WET! ...Then watch what God will do.

The only way to experience the power of God is #1 – Let God exult you. ... #2 – Get your feet wet. ... #3 –

Joshua 3:9-10

Joshua didn't give the people a "religious pep talk." He simply reminded them of the promises of God—the Word of faith—and encouraged them to trust and obey. ... Joshua exulted the Lord and His promises!

Just before crossing over into the Promised Land... verse 9 tells us that Joshua gathered the people to hear the words of the Lord. ... Their excitement... no doubt... was high. ... After waiting so long for this very moment... I am sure they wanted to rush on. "Let's go!" ... But Joshua made them stop and listen.

We live in a fast-paced age... where everyone rushes just to keep up. ... It is easy to get caught up in our tasks... becoming too busy for what God says is most important — namely listening to His words. ... Before making your schedule each and every day... take time to focus on what God may want from all your day's activities. Cling to some of God's promises... especially in light of any stress you might anticipate. ... Knowing what God has said before you rush into your day... can help you avoid foolish mistakes. ... Exult the Lord and His promises.

Joshua's God was more than just the God of Israel. ... He was "the living God" and "the Lord of all the earth." ... Because He is "the living God"... He can defeat the dead idols of the heathen nations that inhabited the land. ... Because He is "the Lord of all the earth"... He can go where He pleases and do what He wishes with every land and nation.

Exodus 19:5 (ESV)

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

Psalm 97:5 (ESV)

The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.

The promise that we see in verse 10 here... **“the living God is among you...”** became the watchword of the Conquest. It was the key to Israel’s victory over the enemies as they entered the land. ... It is a promise that we will see over and over. It appears on almost every page of this book... *“I will be with you!”* And... It is a promise that still sustains the Lord’s people. ... It is the assurance of His presence. ... Do you remember Jesus’ final words... as He ascended into heaven...? “Behold, I am with you – even to the end of the ages...” ... (LISTEN) ... with every challenge you and I face... **the Lord of all the earth is with us!** This is no small thought! This is NOT something for us to take lightly...! What a shame if we simply yawn at such truth... and don’t fully appropriate it.

Vesre 10... *'By this you will know that the living God is among you and He will certainly drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites'.* There is a certain logic behind this assurance. ... If Yahweh can tame a raging river... He can also repel attacking Amorites. ... If He can stop up the Jordan... He can put down the Girgashite. ... If He can get you into the land... He can surely give you the land.

Paul uses the same 'theo-logic' in Romans 8:32—if God did not hold back but gave up His own Son for us... if He went that far... can we not then rest assured that He will grant all other provisions required for our full salvation? It was the reasoning of faith that Israel failed to use in Exodus 16. ... They should have realized that the God Who delivered them from Egypt... would

not let go of them in the wilderness. ... The rescue at the Red Sea... the crossing of the Jordan... and the death and resurrection of Christ are explosions of God's power that are meant to color the whole horizon of the believer's life... in order to assure us that the God Who so mightily handles great emergencies... is surely adequate for the smaller crises and anxieties that are in our life today.

Just before we move on... let me say a word about these nations God was using Israel to drive out. This whole matter of what we may or may not see as God being very fair... is another one of our seven principles for experiencing the power of God.

The only way to experience the power of God is #1 – Let God exult you... #2 – Get your feet wet... #3 – Exult the Lord and His promises... and #4. Join God's work (don't treat it as a matter of Him joining you.) It is His program. **He** is God... whether or not our limited sense of rightness understands or agrees with His.

Why would God help the Israelites drive out these nations from their native land? ... Does that seem fair...? Well... not that God must ever have to justify Himself... but Scripture shows how God had punished Israel first for its disobedience. He then turned to the rest of the nations. Genesis 15:16 implies that the people of Canaan were wicked and deserved to be punished for their terrible sins. ... When God was promising Canaan to Abraham in Genesis 17... He took Abraham to a high mountain overlooking the land. It is implied by what God says to Abraham... that Abraham looked at the nations who occupied the land and was wondering... "What about all these people...?" God reveals to Abraham... that his

descendants will be out of the land for 400 years... which was their time in Egypt... while God would give them time to repent. ... And we know that God kept His messengers in the land... because when Moses met his father-in-law... Jethro... Scripture depicts Jethro as a priest of the most High God... living near the Land of Canaan. ... God had given the nations who Israel was to drive out 400 hundred years to repent... and he left His messengers... like Jethro. Israel was to be a vehicle for this punishment.

More important though... was the fact that Israel... as a holy nation... could not live among such evil and idolatrous people. To do so would be to invite sin into their lives. ... God was preparing a people for Himself... a people who God would use to bring redemption to the whole earth... a people through whom He would send the Messiah. ... The only way to prevent Israel from being so infected by evil religions... so they could last as the People of God through the Centuries... was to drive out those evil nations. ... This was necessary for the entire picture of world-wide redemption.

Principle number 4 ... to experience the power of God... we must join God's work. We must fit into the stream of His Master plan. This is not our show. It isn't about you and I. God is redeeming the world... not making us the center of the universe.

The only way to experience the power of God is #1. – Let God exult you... #2 – Get your feet wet... #3 – Exult the Lord and His promises... #4 – Join God's work. Get the big picture. It isn't about you and I. As Henry Blackaby teaches - Discover where God is at work around you... and join

Him in it. Don't ask Him to join you... rather you join Him... in what he is doing.

#5 is that we must commit ourselves to God's promises...

Joshua 3:11-14

The moment of the dividing came when there was demonstrated a great commitment in both the priests and the people to do the bidding of God. **First**, the people's commitment. *"When the people removed from their tents"*. The people were encamping next to the Jordan. To remove from their tents meant they were moving out on their journey. This was an act of faith as they faced the Jordan river yet they moved out towards the Jordan. When we obey by faith, God works mightily for us. **Second**, the priests' commitment. The moment of dividing also happened when the priests walked into the water of the Jordan. That step of faith was quickly rewarded by the dividing of the waters of the Jordan river.

You can see that the Lord gave them all the information they needed to accomplish what He wanted them to do. You find conditions that the people had to fulfill, orders they had to obey, and promises they had to believe. God always gives His "Word of faith" to His people whenever He asks them to follow Him into new areas of conflict and conquest. God's commandments are still His enablements, and God's promises do not fail.

The counsel of King Jehoshaphat centuries later is still applicable today:

2 Chronicles 20:20 (ESV)

...Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed."

1 Kings 8:56 (ESV)

"Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant."

The sixth and final lesson... The only way to experience the power of God... is #6... to recognize your own inadequacy and helplessness.

Joshua 3:14-15

Since Joshua has just assured us that the Jordan will stop flowing when the ark-bearing priests put their feet in the water (in verse 13)... we begin reading verses 14 and 15 with real expectancy. ... Notice how... in these two verses... the writer builds... clause by clause... detail by detail... to a certain point of tension — it reaches it's peak when the priests' feet dip into the water. ... Then... getting you on the edge of your chair... the author does the most maddening thing. ... He supplies us with a little data on river conditions in springtime... (in the middle of verse 15). (The effect is akin to watching a 1960s television drama... in which hero and heroine are closing in for a climactic kiss... and then suddenly the scene is cut off by a Rice Krispies commercial.) ... By doing so he — however briefly — delays the climax the reader longs for. ... We come back to it in verse 16... 'then the waters coming down from above stopped flowing'. The pattern is this:

Introduction, 14a

'When the people set out from their tents to cross...'

And then we get three clauses... building to climax...

First clause, 14b

'with the priests, bearing the ark of the covenant before the people'

Second clause, 15a

'and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan'

Third clause, 15b

'and the feet of the priests bearing the ark, were dipped in the brink of the water'

Parenthesis delaying climax, 15c

'(now the Jordan overflows its banks all the days of harvest)'

Resolution/continuation, 16a

'The waters coming down from above stopped flowing...'

Why would anyone want to ruin a perfectly good story with a report on river conditions? Because the river helps one to appreciate the miracle.

This river drops one thousand feet from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The drop in elevation is a drop of 40 feet per mile near the Sea of Galilee and an average of 9 feet per mile overall. ... During the flood stage, the river's current speed increases ten miles per hour. ... Normally the Jordan is about one hundred feet wide... but during the floods in the Spring when the snow melts on Mt. Lebanon... the river swells to one mile in width. ... It is a very intimidating sight.

The current was strong because of the drop in elevation (a drop of 40 feet per mile near the Sea of Galilee and an average of 9 feet per mile overall).

This means that the river Israel faced that springtime was no placid stream but a raging torrent... probably a mile wide and covering a mass of tangled brush and jungle growth.

Such detail is important. ... When was it that God led Israel through the Jordan? ... Precisely at the time of year when such a feat looked and was impossible. ... Why does the God of the Bible insist on fording the river at the most impossible of times? ... I am not sure. ... But this is a marked tendency of God's ways.

Yahweh delights to show His might in the face of our utter helplessness... apparently so that we cannot help seeing that we contribute nothing to our own deliverance.

There is a strangeness about Yahweh's method, and yet there is a method in his 'madness'. Perhaps He brings you and I into impossible circumstances... situations so bleak and hopeless... for the very purpose of impressing upon us... that if we make it through... if we endure it... if we are not overwhelmed and washed away... it will be only because of His grace and power. Could this be God's way of teaching us our own inability and helplessness... in order that we may realize...

Psalm 121:2 (ESV)

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

God sometimes ask us to do the difficult... so that He will get the glory when the task is done. ... He may lead us to go forward when our circumstances are the bleakest... to show His power over our circumstances and obstacles.

Joshua 3:16-17

By this great miracle, the crossing of **the Jordan** River at flood stage by a nation of about 2 million people, God was glorified, Joshua was exalted, **Israel** was encouraged, and the Canaanites were terrorized.

For Israel the crossing of the Jordan meant they were irrevocably committed to a struggle against armies, chariots, and fortified cities. They were also committed to walk by faith in the living God and to turn from walking according to the flesh as they had often done in the wilderness.

For believers today... crossing the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another. ... It is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised. ... This should mean the end of a life lived by human effort and the beginning of a life of faith and obedience.

What a tragedy it is when God's people fail to claim their inheritance and wander aimlessly through life as Israel did in the wilderness. We never stand still in the Christian life; we either move forward in faith or go backward in unbelief.

Let God exult you.

Get your feet wet

Exult the Lord and His promises

Join in on God's work

Commit yourself to God's promises

Recognize your own inadequacy and helplessness