

Movin' on out. Joshua 3

You've been travelling for a good while now, and the novelty of backpacking has well and truly worn off. You're sick of living out of a rucksack, fed up with having to pack up and move on every day, you've had enough of that smelly little tent and your fellow traveller's snoring. And to think this started out as some kind of adventure. The new walking guide seems very young and inexperienced, and you wonder if he really knows what he's doing.

But today things are looking up. Today's the day you get to a caravan park. Oh the luxury – hot showers, nice toilets, a shop, and best of all a bedroom all to yourself.

In fact you can actually see the caravans from the hill that you're standing on now. You trot down the hill, aching legs forgotten, and there at the bottom is.... the M6. Six lanes of fast moving traffic and no way across.

Joshua & the people of Israel found themselves up against an equally daunting barrier. The river Jordan.

They'd been travelling for forty years. Their trusted leader had died, and now they had this young whipper snapper Joshua, yet to really prove himself.

God's people camped at Shittim on the East bank of Jordan ready to cross to the west. As they pitched their tents again there was an awful lot riding on this next step. Here, just across the way, so near but yet so far was the land that God had promised. Nothing particularly spectacular about this land in its own right – a miserable and insignificant strip. A land bridge between the two super powers of the time, Egypt & Mesopotamia. But it was to be theirs. Their own land after being nomads for 500 years. It had been so long since the time of Abraham, holding on to that promise. Through all the difficulties of slavery in Egypt, fleeing dramatically, wondering what the heck they were doing wandering around in the desert. Here they were, the promised land was in sight.

Stepping out in faith:

I felt very strongly that this morning I should bring a message for us as individuals and as a church about stepping out in faith. Here were a group of weary travellers, and a leader they weren't sure was up to the job, about to face a seemingly insurmountable barrier. It really was a case of stepping out in faith.

So what did the people of Israel do?

1. Recall what God has done

Well firstly they recalled what God had done previously. Although it doesn't actually say in chapter 3 that they remembered what had happened in the past, The whole of the book of Joshua draws parallels with Moses' leading that is recorded in Exodus and Numbers. The story of the escape from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea would still have been very prominent in their minds. Here they were again. Facing a water barrier. What had God done last time? He'd opened up the sea before them, and closed it on the pursuing Egyptians. If God could do that once, couldn't he do it again?

I thought I was fine about starting secondary school until that first morning in September, when arriving in the kitchen in my over sized uniform, I found that I was too nervous to eat. I couldn't even poke down a tiny piece of toast. Not eating in our house was a sign of grave illness. A serious cause for concern. It was a sure sign of how nervous I was. And that not being able to eat in the mornings carried on for a few weeks. My mum, looking for some words of encouragement, said to me, 'you probably won't be this nervous again until you start university'. Well, when I was eleven, starting university seemed about as near as taking a trip to the moon. But you know, she was right, (as I find we mothers so often are!!)

Obviously I settled down at school, had a good time, started eating breakfast again, and wondered what all the fuss had been about. Seven years later, on the verge of leaving home for university, taking the next big step in my life, fears of stepping into the unknown were back again. And eating breakfast became an issue again.

As soon as we've done something we wonder what we worried about. Its past, its experienced, its over, its grist to the mill, water under the bridge, or in the people of Israel's case, no water under the bridge.

The times when we face something new, big, exciting, nerve- wracking etc, are the times when we can recall what God has done.

And as we recall what God has done we're reminded of his faithfulness and how he has helped us overcome those difficulties, problems, barriers. So that when we face the next hurdle that comes our way we can be sure that God will be faithful.

Recall what God has done in your life.

Recall what God has done in the life of this church

2. Move out from your position

V3b & 4 'you are to move out from your positions and follow it'.(the ark of the covenant that is) Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.

Some people are real creatures of habit and they can settle down into a routine after just a short time. Amongst the people of Israel I bet there were a fair number who liked their routine. Even with the goal in sight they would be saying – we've just got the tent up. It takes me ages to build my portable shelves. I'm not dismantling them again in a hurry. Here will do just fine. After all we've got a nice view of the promised land. They'd only been camping on the east bank for 3 days, but that was probably enough time to get settled.

Do you like your current position? Are you happy and content where you are? That's great! But don't lose sight of the fact that God might have more in store for you.

The story is told of a newly wed couple off on their honeymoon to Italy. The husband, being a romantic sort of guy, had spoken to the manager of the hotel they were going to and arranged to

have the best suite in the hotel, the largest, the most stunning view, champagne on ice, flowers all over, you name it, he'd arranged it.

To save a bit of money he had booked their flights with a budget airline, and when they got to the airport after their big day it all started to go wrong. There was no flight, and so they ended up shoved on a much later plane, arriving at their hotel cross, tired and in the middle of the night.

The manager was understandably nowhere to be seen, but the night porter was on duty. They communicated in grunts and shrugs – being typical Brits they thought everyone spoke English – the night porter clearly didn't.

They pointed out their name on his list of rooms, and he smiled, picked up their bags and led them to a door. With a flourish he opened the door and put the bags down, before heading off back to his desk. The couple walked in with anticipation to find.... the smallest hotel room they had ever stayed in. There wasn't even a proper bed – it was a bed settee. Exhausted and disappointed they unfolded the bed, flopped down on it and spent a very uncomfortable night.

First thing in the morning the new husband stormed down to see the manager. He'd spent the night getting crosser and crosser at all his ruined plans. As he set eyes on the manager he began to let rip about his disappointment, and how he demanded to be moved to the best room immediately. The manager looked puzzled, and leading him back to the room said, but sir this is the best room....

He opened the hotel room door, squeezed past the bed settee and flung open a door that the couple had assumed was a wardrobe. There in front of them was the most amazing suite, the most wonderful view, the champagne still in its ice bucket. The couple had spent the night in the lobby of their suite.

God had so much more for the Israelites. If they'd settled east of the Jordan they would never have received it. God has so much more for us – eternity with him for sure, but also in this life.

If we're contented now that's good. But what more could we have (I'm not talking about things). If we're contented in the life of the church, that's good. But what more could we have. What more could we be doing. What more has God got in store for us if we will only open the door.

I wonder what positions we have become established in? Personally, and in the life of the church? In what ways might God be calling us to 'move out' and follow?

What are God's plans? How much more is there if we will only open the door?

3. God will lead the way

V4 'Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.'

This was the Israelites first crossing of the Jordan. In all their forty years of wandering they'd never come across it.

Pillars of fire and cloud had led them in the past, this time it was to be the priests carrying the ark of the covenant that they would follow.

V11 'See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go ahead of you'

Contained in that verse is the wonderful sense that God goes ahead of his people. He has already been to all the places we will go, and that includes the darkest places we find ourselves, and even death. Jesus suffered fully and completely on the cross. He has already gone ahead of us.

So God leads the way, but then we have to actually get on and do it.

4. Get on and do it!

Quaker woman, Hannah Whitall Smith knew of a lady who asked God every morning whether she should get up. Having consecrated the day to the Lord she would not stir until the voice told her to get up and dress. The Quaker lady asked the Lord about each article of clothing she should wear, and the Lord led her sometimes with stockings, sometimes not!!

Its all very well knowing you need to step out in faith – thinking back to what God has done in the past, recalling his faithfulness, striking camp in preparation, trusting that God will show you the way. But then you've actually got to do it. There was a point for the people of Israel when they had to move from preparation into actually stepping into the Jordan. The priests had to actually put their feet in the water and stand there with the ark of the covenant. And then the people had to step down into the river bed and keep walking until they were across to the other side.

Is there something you have been preparing for that now you actually need to get on and do?

5. Give God praise & glory

If you read on into chapter 4 you'll see that Joshua set up 12 stones at Gilgal. Stones that were taken out of the Jordan river bed, one for each of the tribes, and set up as a memorial.

Ch 4 v 22 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground. For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over.'

Let's never forget it is God who has led us, God who has kept us, God who has blessed us.

This building that we're in this morning is a sign that God has been faithful over 200 years. Let's give him the praise and glory.

6th September 2009 House Group Notes
Movin' on out. Joshua Chapter 3

After forty years in the wilderness Joshua & the people of Israel found themselves camped on the East side of the River Jordan with that one obstacle between them and the promised land.

Whilst there was nothing spectacular about the land of Canaan in its own right, it formed a land bridge between the two super powers of the time – Egypt and Mesopotamia. But more significantly it was to become 'home' to the people of God after 500 years of nomadic wandering.

Crossing the Jordan required Joshua and the people to step out in faith. There are at least five steps that can be identified in this process.

6. **Recall what God has done**
7. **Move out from your position**
8. **Know that God will lead the way**
9. **Get on and do it!**
10. **Give God praise & glory**

For Discussion

- The book of Joshua mirrors that of Exodus and Numbers in many ways. God leading the people safely through a physical barrier of water is one example. Can you identify some of the others?

(see Numbers 13, Joshua 2; Exodus 4:24-26, Josh 5:2-9; Exodus 3:1, Josh 5:13)

- How would recalling what God had done previously help the Israelites? How does it help you?
- *Josh3 v3b 'you are to move out from your positions and follow it. [the ark of the covenant]'*

What is our response when we feel settled and like where we are? What positions do we find ourselves in that God is calling us to move from? How do we know when He is calling us to stay?

- *Josh3 v11 'See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.'*

God went ahead of the people, as he had in the wilderness. In what ways does God go ahead of the people of Wade Street Church? Think of times when you have been particularly aware of God travelling ahead of you.

- Spend some time giving God the praise & glory.