

ESF Lord's day message
4/17/2016

Overcoming Obstacles in Life

Joshua 3:9-17

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."

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 (that is, the Dead 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 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.

After forty years of wandering in the desert, finally the Israelites came near the promised land. But between the Israelites and the promised land, was a river called the Jordan. They had to cross over the river to enter the promised land. The river was an obstacle which was impossible for them to overcome.

There is a Jordan for every one of us. Your Jordan may be different from mine, but what is the same is that it stands between God's promise and us. And the only way we can get through it is faith.

Trust that God uses obstacles to help you grow in faith

When the Israelites arrived at the river Jordan, it was the time of the harvest. This was the time when the Jordan river always overflows its banks and engulfs the surrounding plain. When the river was in full flood, it stretched over a mile wide and could be up to twelve feet deep in places. It was too wide, too deep and too dangerous to swim across. There were no bridges that they could walk across. There was no boat that they could use to row across. After following God's guidance to the promised land, they faced an impossible obstacle to overcome. How on earth were they going to overcome this obstacle?

Why did God lead them to this place? Why did He bring them to the border of the promised land at this time when the Jordan was at its widest and deepest? Why didn't He bring them to this place another time when the river was only about 100 feet wide and not all that deep in places.

It would have been much easier for them to cross then.

Did God lead them there just to trouble them? No! Did God lead them there only to find another way to enter the promised land? No! Did God lead them there only to give up on entering the land? Absolutely not! Then why did God do so? It is because God wanted to test their faith and strengthen their faith through the test. With such an obstacle, God encouraged them to trust in Him who would provide a way to overcome the impossible obstacle.

In front of the flooded Jordan river, God gave them a word of assurance:

Look at verses 9-10, *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,Amorites and Jebusites.*

God assured the people with his Word that they would overcome the obstacle and He would lead them to the promised land.

To overcome obstacles in our lives, we must trust that God uses obstacles to help us grow in faith.

While Jesus trained His disciples, he used obstacles too. There was an obstacle when they should feed 5000 people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. It was a financial obstacle. There was an obstacle of nature, when they faced storms in the middle of the sea. Jesus did not prevent them from the obstacles but challenged them to overcome the obstacles with faith.

Philip Keller in his book on Joshua picks up on this theme when he comments "For all of us there are bound to be formidable 'floods' in the stream of life. Just as Joshua and Israel now faced a raging river that overflowed its banks and inundated its flood plain, so will we. God does not try to hold us back from the rampaging currents of life. He does not ask us to retreat or to withdraw from the threat that would engulf us. He does not urge us to try and find some way around the apparently impossible barriers before us. He asks us to believe that He brought us here; It is he who will keep us and preserve us here and it is He who will take us on from here...For ultimately it is the Lord who shows himself strong on behalf of those who...quietly step out in the surging streams of life. Then they will see what wonders God can perform."

Are you facing an obstacle which is impossible to overcome today?
Trust God who uses the obstacle to let you grow in faith.

Follow the examples of men of faith

God told the priests to take the ark of covenant and move ahead of the people and set foot in the flooding water of the river. God used the spiritual leaders as an example of how to step up with faith in front of an impossible obstacle. Then God commanded all the people to follow them.

Spiritual leaders are also sinners like anybody else. But the reason God chooses them to hold leadership is to use their lives as examples for people to follow.

When people see a good example of faith of their leaders, they can learn practically how to live by faith, and they can apply the example to their own lives.

Those who are not leaders are responsible for following the leaders who are living by faith. Hebrews 13:7 says, *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”*

When God told the Israelites to follow the priests who took the ark of the covenant and set foot in the flooding water of the river, they followed and God cut off the water of the river.

Many years ago in the city of Minneapolis at Bethlehem Baptist Church they needed a Sunday school teacher for the junior boys. They were so energetic that no teacher had been able to control them. Ewald Chaldberg, a Swedish immigrant, was asked to teach, and he took the junior boys class. Ewald still had his Swedish accent. Buzzing all over

the church was the word, "He'll never make it. Three weeks, and that will be the end." But somehow Ewald Chaldberg trusted God when he took the class, and he stayed with it through the years, continuing to teach the boys.

Some years later the church had a service for the tenth anniversary of the death of Ewald Chaldberg. During the service, they recounted that at least forty men were in Christian service someplace in the world because Ewald Chaldberg, who loved them, and watched over them as they grew in his Sunday school class. Ewald Chaldberg had faith to believe that God could overcome his human limitations.

On the morning of that anniversary celebration, twenty-seven lay persons stood up to say, "We're going to be like Ewald Chaldberg in a small way." The obscure immigrant with a Swedish accent found significance because he trusted the Lord who uses leaders to influence many people.

As a church, we may constantly face obstacles before us. Consequently we have to follow the principle of faith here. If you think you are leaders in this church, your main job is to set good examples of faith through your own lives, so that other people can follow your way of faith. If you are not a leader, you have to try to see good examples of faith among leaders in the church, then learn from them and follow their examples. Then God will let us overcome all the impossible obstacles before us.

Even if you are not a leader in the church, if you are a believer, you are a leader in this world, not in the sense of position, but in the sense that you are the light and salt in this world.

God has called you to be a good example of how to live a holy life, so that unbelievers around you may be able to see the glory of God through you and turn their hearts to the Lord. It does not mean that you must be just a good person. It means that even if you are not perfect, Jesus can

use your life to demonstrate His grace, His love, and His forgiveness when you trust in Him. When people see Jesus in you, they will follow you not because of who you are but because of who Jesus is in you.

Follow God's presence

One more principle in overcoming an obstacle is to follow God's presence.

The ark is mentioned fifteen times in chapters 3 and 4 in the book of Joshua. In today's text, following the Ark of the Covenant is stressed several times.

What's so important about following the ark?

The ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the Covenant (Hebrews 9:4). The ark had evidence of God's miracles for His people. The ark had the covenant that God had established with the people of Israel. Also the ark symbolized God's presence.

So following the ark represents following God's presence as revealed by His miracles, and by the covenant.

When God told them to follow the ark in front of the Jordan river, He meant that they should not depend on what they had or what they could do but depend upon God's presence.

Then how does God reveal His presence today? How can we follow God's presence?

We may see God's presence in supernatural miracles. God has given us clear evidence that He can perform miracles for believers. If you are a believer, God has given you the evidence of His miracles for you.

Whenever you face impossible obstacles, remember how the Lord blessed you through His miracles in the past. And confess your faith that the Lord will provide a miraculous way for you to overcome the impossible obstacle.

But even if there is no miracle, we can see God's presence in His written words. In the ark there was also the words. When we read, hear and meditate on God's words, and follow the words, God reveals His presence to us.

God's presence through the words enables us to overcome impossible obstacles.

Also Jesus is God's presence. When a disciple asked him "show me God" Jesus told him, "If you see me, you see God." In Jesus we can see God's presence.