

SOUTH GROVE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LONDON

Bible study/prayer meeting

End of the Year Meeting

Date 28th December 2022

Preacher Rev Philip Knowles, Ps/ Hymns 50, 489, 726, Read: Joshua 3:1-5

Text Joshua 3:4

Title: Ye have not passed This way Before

In seeking a word from God for our end of the year service, the Lord impressed upon my heart the words of **Joshua 3:4** “**for ye have not passed this way heretofore.**”

The word **heretofore**, means **before.**

Off course in the truest sense these are timeless in their application for they apply for everyday and every situation that arises, **ye have not passed this way heretofore.**”

These words were spoken, by the officers or leaders of Israel to the Lord’s people when they had assembled on the eastern side of Jordan just before their entrance into Canaan, the land of promise.

They had come out of Egypt, and remained in the wilderness for 40 years, but they had never before crossed the Jordan.

By their very location, it is clear they were standing in place they have never been before.

Standing by the River Jordan, they were on new ground and they were on the verge of an entirely new experience in their history as a nation.

Apart from Joshua and Caleb the entire company of at least two million people, were a new generation, none of them had even passed the Red Sea when they were saved from Egypt.

They were born in the wilderness, so they certainly had never stood before at the River Jordan where they were now assembled.

It was at this time, the Lord's word was delivered to the people, ***"ye have not passed this way heretofore"***.

As the Lord continually leads His people, He brings them through many new experiences and situations that they have never encountered before.

There may be a situation in your life, the cost of living, rising bills, a health issue, a work problem, family issues, decisions making, personal matters, or as a church planning to forward into new ministries, when the Lord says to His people ***"ye have not passed this way heretofore"***.

I FIRST, YE HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE WAS A WORD OF CHANGE.

Now while the Lord, Jehovah does not change in His person, promises and plans for His people, yet as He leads His people forward, He brings them into change or permits changing circumstances, in order to produce spiritual growth and godly character.

He brings them out of their comfort zone into progressing and praying zone.

In these verses Israel, are on the border of Canaan, ready to enter the land flowing with Milk and honey.

It is the land given to them by God. There will be a change of location, as to where they are standing and to where they are going, ***"ye have not passed this way heretofore"***.

But the blessing for God's people is in every change He faithful will remain. He uses the name LORD signifying Jehovah, as **Neh 9:32** confirms He ***"keepeth covenant and mercy..."*** or as **Heb**

13:5 “*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*” or as **Mal 3:6** “*I AM the LORD I change not...*” as **Heb 13:8** “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and for ever.*”

Always keep in view, that while the way was unknown and new to Israel, it was not unknown and new to the Lord.

It was the Lord who led His people a right.

When everything appears out of control, He is in control.

Rest assured as **Ps 1:6** “*for the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous...*” the Psalmist in **Ps 139** testified the Lord has known him, and in **verse 3** “*...acquainted with all my ways.*” He know every detail of our lives, as Christ said in **Matt 10:30** “*...the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*”

When circumstances change, with regard to your living arrangements, location, finances, change in occupation, sorrow, bereavement, health, and family matters.

News that impacts your marriage or your children. Trials and troubles more than any other year, rising costs, but it causes you to say, I have not passed this way heretofore, this is all new to me.

I don't know what will come next. I don't how to handle this, I don't know how to meet this, I've never been in this situation before.

Therefore, keep your eyes upon one who knows what comes next, one who has a handle on it, who has passed that way before, Christ our forerunner, Christ our provider, Christ our guide.

Always remember, the Lord still leads His people forward, as they had the ark of the Covenant.

The ark symbolised the person and presence of Jesus Christ, as **Ex 25:10-11** teaches it was one ark made of two materials, wood overlaid with pure gold.

In taking the typology and symbolism of the tabernacle, in reference to the ark, the **wood** which was durable, it was acacia wood, it was strong, to picture Christ's sinless humanity, and the **gold** spoke of His deity, as gold was associated Royalty.

Christ was given the gift of gold by the wise men, as He is King.

The two materials spoke of the one ark, just as Jesus Christ, is one person with two distinct natures, God and man.

Very God of very God, and very man of very man.

The ark spoke of the person of Jesus Christ, the one who saves by grace and guides by grace.

All the way my Saviour leads me, He gives grace for every trial, for I know whatever befall me Jesus doeth all things well.

The way in which you will pass this new year as never before, you have one who surrounds you and goes with and before you.

II SECOND, YE HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE WAS A WORD OF CHALLENGE.

The Lord's word '**ye have not passed this way heretofore**', means that there are various situations of which we presently know nothing of, but we must go forward, nonetheless.

They were challenged by an obstacle. To enter into the land of Canaan, they had to cross over the river Jordan.

Now to cross the Jordan at any time was challenging, but the time the Lord choses for them to cross seemed to be an obstacle in their sight.

Notice the last words of **verse 15** “*for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest.*” At harvest time, the Jordan river overflowed.

The water was rising higher than normal. But to enter into the land, they must cross over Jordan. They must get into the water make their way across.

To not progress was to lose out, and disobey.

Apart from Joshua and Caleb who crossed the Red Sea, everyone in this group had not crossed the red sea.

It was a blessing for the older generation and a younger generation to see the Lord work wonders again in their midst.

May both the older and younger in this congregation see the Lord do wonders among us in 2023.

In a real sense, crossing Jordan was a way that Joshua and Caleb had not passed before.

Joshua and Caleb witnessed God supernaturally intervene in the Red Sea, God parted the water and Israel walked across on dry ground to the other side, however, at Jordan, God intervened, He parted the river, but He did a new thing, He had not previously done at the Red Sea.

From **verse 14-17** as soon as the priests feet touched he Jordan river, God parted or divided it, and in **verse 17** “*the priest that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.*”

The Ark of the covenant stood in the mist of the Jordan river as the people passed over.

The ark symbolised the presence of God. Upon the top of the ark was a lid or covering called “the mercy seat.

Ex 25:21-22 teaches It was upon the mercy seat that the Lord manifested His presence in a special way. It was the place He would meet with His people.

In **Lev 16:14**, on the Day of Atonement, the mercy seat was sprinkled with the blood from sacrifice upon the Brazen Altar, and there the glory of the Lord appeared, teaching His presence among His people.

As Israel journeyed in the wilderness, **Num 9:15-16** reveals that Lord guided them by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, again to symbolise His presence among them.

Therefore, when the ark came to this crossing of Jordan, according to God’s word of promise the cloud symbolising His presence would have been on the mercy seat, to teach the people it is only through the victory of the atoning death of Christ that we can have the presence of God and walk the paths that we have not crossed heretofore.

The Lord is teaching us child of God, that upon the ground of the blood of Christ, the presence of the Lord will bring us through every challenging obstacle in 2023.

He goes through the storm with us and brings us safely through to the other side.

This is vital to see, because, ‘**ye have not passed this way heretofore**’, we enter a new year there will be obstacles, hurdles, and it may seem there is no way through, and over, yet in every and any challenging obstacle, the Lord will bring us through by the victory of His blood.

Christ will not fail us, He has promised His sufficient grace, rather,

James 4:6 “*He giveth more grace.*”

III THIRD, YE HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE WAS A WORD OF COURAGE.

To enter the Promised Land that lay before them, Israel would in fact be entering their inheritance that the Lord had covenanted to give them.

They would enter into possession of what the Lord had provided for them. They would claim and enjoy all the blessing God has promised them in Christ.

crossing Jordan, was a way they had not passed before, yet they could pass with courage and confidence knowing they went according to the will and word of God. He wanted them to possess these blessings.

It was His will to obey His word and follow His way.

Here is the greatest encouragement for the people of God, while you may not know all the ins and outs about tomorrow, and further yet if you can say today I am where God wants me to be doing what God has called me to do, then going forward into new territory you have a word of courage.

They could pass knowing God desires to bless His people with good things.

It is interesting to note that the ark went before them, and as they went after it, they were lead into blessings of God.

Since the Lord goes before, we need not hesitate to move in the ways that are new to us, but go in power of His might, our courage is in the Lord.

Whatever situation you find yourself in, God has permitted and ordered it and while, we do not understand the way in which God orders our steps, yet we are assured of **Deuteronomy 31:8** “***And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed***”

Every New Year, Every New Day and Every New Way, will lead us to see the sovereignty of God that He is in full control,

Throughout 2022 He has been working ALL things together for our good and for His glory. He is ruling over that situation, and He will also do the same in **2023**.

IV FOURTH, YE HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE WAS A WORD OF COUNSEL

As stated, the words “***ye have not passed this way heretofore,***” actually come after Lord’s counsel to His people.

When the Priests and Levites carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, then the people where to go after it, in other words, follow behind the ark.

However in **verse 4** The Lord gave clear counsel “***..there shall be a space between you and it about two thousand cubits by measure, come not near unto it that ye may know the way by which ye must go for the ye have not passed this way heretofore.***”

As the company of God’s people followed the ark the kept at a certain space.

(The ark was about 2000 cubits ahead of the congregation, which amounted to about **three quarters of a mile.**)

Why the space? so everyone in the congregation could see the ark. It meant that no person would cause another to lose focus.

At the front, middle or back as they moved forward into unknown territory, they had a view of the ark.

Surely the Lord's counsel is for us child of God, it's easy to be distracted, and discouraged in thinking what lies ahead,

therefore, in entering into 2023, always keep Christ before, always have your mind fixed upon Jesus Christ.

Don't allow your view of Christ to be distracted at the end of the year and the new year.

Rather, hear the Lord's counsel follow the ark, then you will know the way ahead, because ***ye have not passed this way.***

Paul counselled God's people who had become distracted, and discouraged. **Heb 12:2** “ ***Looking unto Jesus the Author, and finisher of our faith.***”

The word for “**looking unto**” signifies ***to fix your eyes upon.*** It sets **Christ as the supreme example** that He alone should be our focus.

Furthermore, The Greek preposition **apo unto** – means ***to look away from everything else.*** ‘**looking away from, unto Jesus**’. Therefore, the idea is to direct one's attention without distraction.

We are to run the race looking away from everything else, but fixing our attention on Christ.

The word **looking** also is **present tense** it must be a continual look – Therefore continually looking unto Jesus, or keep on looking unto Jesus.

What or who has seen us through another year and what will see us through another year, a time whereby we have not passed this

way before, the counsel of the Lord for it standeth sure, go after the Lord, keep your eyes firmly fixed upon Christ.

Unsaved one, look away from every false hope and look to the only true Hope Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.