

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-4-16 AM NOTES
"FORWARD BY FAITH"
JOSHUA 3:1-17
5 in Series, "A Vision Fulfilled"

Philippians 1:6 (AMP) "And I am convinced *and* sure of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] *and* perfecting *and* bringing it to full completion in you."

I. The Preparation for Going Forward by Faith (vv. 1-5)

"I dedicate myself, my time, my capabilities, my ambition, everything to Him. Blessed Lord, sanctify me to Thy uses. Give me no worldly success which may not lead me nearer to my Savior." —Dr. Howard Kelly

II. The Promises for Going Forward by Faith (vv. 6-13)

"There is a God. He has spoken in His word. He means all He has said, and will do all He has promised." —Hudson Taylor's Life Philosophy

III. The Path for Going Forward by Faith (vv. 14-17)

"Faith is not a passive feeling; it's an active force." —Warren Weirsbe

"Faith is acting like God is telling the truth." —Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones

- The water flow stopped just as God said that it would.
- The wall of water was held in place for probably a whole day (two million people is a lot of people).
- The river bottom was supernaturally dried.
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Jeremiah 32:27 "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"

First Baptist Church Powell 09 04 2016 AM

Sermon 5: Forward by Faith

Series: A Vision Fulfilled

Joshua 3:1-17

Have you discovered that we all seem to have a tendency to settle into a life where we are comfortable and are able to handle things in our own strength? That just seems to be our flesh's default mode. What is true of us as individuals is true of churches. No church just naturally gravitates into a situation where they launch out with boldness accepting challenges to meet needs that pull them out of their comfort zone and cause them to risk failure. Because of these tendencies, churches often get in ruts and lose sight of the vision that God has for them. God's vision for the church (any local church) will always make the church uncomfortable. If the challenge is from God, it will call us into a place where we are in over our heads and only God can accomplish what He has given us to do.

To accomplish a God given vision will require that we live by faith, which is to live in total dependence on God to do what we are totally incapable of doing. Our God does not want His church to become complacent, comfortable, or to rest on past victories. He is always leading to another "impossible challenge" that requires us to totally surrender to and trust in Him to accomplish the vision He has given us. I have just described for you the 127-year history of our church. There are some who have been here many years longer than I, who could tell stories from the 1940's through the 1970's, but I only have firsthand stories from 1986, when I came here as the pastor. Indulge me while I spend just a few minutes sharing this pattern of how God works in and through His church. This isn't an exhaustive summary, but a few of the highlights of seeing God give a vision and then fulfill it.

I remember the first big, uncomfortable, step we took in obedience to God. We were quickly outgrowing our facilities and we went to two Sunday Schools and two Worship services. That seems really small now, but in 1987, that was a huge step of faith for us. Many in the church had never heard of such a thing. Would it destroy our fellowship and be like two churches meeting in the same building? How would we get enough teachers? Yet the church voted unanimously to follow the path we believed that God was leading us on. God blessed, but before we could catch our breath, He led us to build a new education building. That was a huge step of faith.

In early 1990 we completed the three story education building where the fellowship hall and preschool department are today. Maybe now we could cool it awhile and be comfortable. No, there was more.

We next moved to three morning worship services, and an overflow area for the evening service for those who we could not fit into the worship center. Could we relax now? No, God began to work through some of the men in our church about becoming more personally involved in international missions. Groups started going to Brazil, and to make it more affordable, the church paid a large portion of the cost and the missions budget skyrocketed. How were we going to afford this? We obeyed and trusted in the God who never has a financial crisis. The money came in. Eventually the vision led us to adopt multiple unreached, unengaged people groups in some of the most remote places on earth.

In 1997, God led us to build a new worship center. Here was the really uncomfortable part of that. We sensed that He was leading us to not borrow for the building. The building was going to cost about five million dollars. How would we ever raise that kind of money? We launched out into water over our head and trusted God to provide. He did! In spite of huge problems that included the pew company going bankrupt and leaving us in a lurch, in August of 2000 we moved into the Worship Center, debt free.

Now we could relax and be comfortable? No, there was another level. It had to do with changing the whole structure of leadership to a more Biblical approach of elders leading the congregation and not just one man. That involved a long process of educating our people in what we believed that the Bible taught on this issue and changing our constitution. There was potential for great turmoil and some churches have even split over this issue, but we moved ahead trusting God and the transition to an elder system

(which took several years) went through with very little opposition. We had obeyed the Lord and now maybe we could relax? Not so!

In 2006, God led us to start a Christian school. It was a real step of faith because it was not to be like most other church started schools. This one would never be self-supporting because the children from less affluent families could attend with tuition based on income.

Surely now, we could slow down a little and coast. Not so! God opened another door involving revitalizing struggling churches. FBC Fountain City asked if we could come alongside and help this church that had struggled with a twenty-year decline in attendance. That “assistance” led to a merger of the churches so that in June of 2008, the First Baptist Church of Fountain City became the First Baptist Church of Powell – Fountain City Campus. A significant number of families answered the call to leave the Powell Campus and invest their lives in the Fountain City revitalization. On January 1, 2017, this revitalized church will be handed back over to the congregation and will once again become the First Baptist Church of Fountain City. Later, one of our elders, David Trent was called out to plant a new church in the “Old North Knoxville” area and after an appeal for those who would go with him, sixty-seven of our people (counting their children) went on this new adventure.

In recent years God led us to build the Family Life Center, purchase more property, and a multitude of other challenges. The Lord has sent out several families who have sensed God leading them to struggling churches who had a connection with our church primarily through the pastor of the churches having come out of this church. We have just heard of another church who wants to talk to us about a revitalization.

I know, I left out a whole bunch of things, but what a journey God has taken us on! It has not all been smooth. In some of the directions we have gone there were people who chose not to go with us, they left the church, and we grieved over them. Yet in all of this, as we have trusted in God, He has supplied the finances, the people, and the wisdom to carry out everything that He has given us to do. When we as a church, or you as an individual say, “That’s it. I want to just be comfortable for a while. I’m tired of always being in over my head and having to live in total dependence on God,” growth stops (individual growth and church growth), and we become stagnant. God seems far away, joy fades, life loses its adventure, and we begin a season of wasting our lives and being subject to the correcting discipline of God. God is so committed to finish what He started with us that He will sacrifice our comfort, our circumstance based serenity, and our circumstance fueled pleasure to take us to the next level of growth and intimacy with Him. Philippians 1:6 (AMP): “And I am convinced *and* sure of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] *and* perfecting *and* bringing it to full completion in you.” That is true of individuals and of churches.

Let’s go back to Joshua. We move from last week, where we looked at the faith of an individual named Rahab, to the faith of a nation who was being led way out of their comfort zone to possess the land God had given them. Learn this: every time God leads His people on a new adventure of obedience, there are going to be obstacles – seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Next week as we share the vision that God has given us, there will obstacles to seeing these visions fulfilled. We must avoid playing the coward and turning away because the obstacles seem insurmountable. We must continue forward by faith.

I. Preparation for Going Forward by Faith (v 1-5)

The Israelites faced the impossible barrier of the swollen Jordan River. Normally the Jordan River isn’t all that big. On our first trip to the Holy Land, my biggest surprise was the Jordan River. I had something like the Mississippi River in my mind. In places during the dry parts of the year, it looks more like the Beaver Creek! The Jordan River flows north to south. It stretches over 200 miles from Mount Herman to the Dead Sea. Mount Herman is about 9,232 feet above sea level (Mount LeConte in the Smoky Mountains is about 6600 feet) and the Dead Sea is the lowest elevation on land anywhere in the world (1,407 feet below sea level). At Jericho, the width of the Jordan River was normally about thirty yards wide. However, at this time of the year it was swollen by rains and the melting snow on Mount Herman.

At the time the Israelites were preparing to cross into Jericho, the Jordan was close to a mile wide. It had a current of about ten MPH. Suffice it to say that it was an absolute impossibility for about two million people to cross the Jordan. One of the reasons that God left them there for three days was so that the impossibility of the situation would sink in.

Perhaps you can identify with these Israelites. You may be personally facing a seemingly impossible obstacle that stands between you and doing what you believe that God is leading you to do, but I want to focus on the church. This past week, I was sitting at an eleven and under football game with my friend, Pastor Jerry Cox, the longtime pastor of Powell Church of God. We were both there watching our grandsons play and we began to talk about how fast the culture has been taken over by the forces of darkness. The speed with which the Christian influence in our land has all but disappeared is mind boggling. I know of no one who predicted that it would happen this fast. We can truly relate to what Joshua said in verse 4: "...for: you have not passed this way before."

This is no time for us, as a church, to form our little cocoons and isolate ourselves from the world around us. This is the time we become more aggressive than ever before in making disciples. The vision we will share next week will focus on that. The task is impossible. On a personal level, your struggle may be with raising children in a Satan controlled culture; it may be problems with your vocation, pressure to accept as normal and acceptable what God calls sin, or any number of other things. May I suggest to you that perhaps God has allowed us to come to this place to give us the opportunity to get away from a self-empowered, self-controlled life – a comfortable life where we think we are in control and fairly comfortable.

In verse 5, the word translated "consecrate" means to sanctify or set apart. It speaks of a total, nothing held back, surrender to the Lord. We will never see what God has for us come to fruition (personally or in the church) until there is a complete surrender to the Lord, giving Him the complete control of our lives. In this culture it is clearer than ever that we have to choose sides. In reality, there never was a middle road, but now the absence of that middle road is obvious to all. Those who refuse to give Him control will continue in the wilderness and be under the disciplining hand of God. That is the preparation for moving to the next level.

II. The Promises for Going Forward by Faith (v 6-13)

Ten times in this chapter, the Ark of the Covenant is referred to. The ark symbolized the presence and promises of God. The ark went ahead of the people so that all could see it. When we take our eyes off our sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God, we put our eyes on the circumstances and the obstacles. When we do that, our faith fades and we retreat back to the wilderness. The world system that has Satan as its god seems so powerful; it seems to have control and seems to be winning over the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has captured the government, the media, and an ever increasing number of the churches. We desperately need the manifest presence of God in our homes and in our churches before we can chase out the darkness with the light of God's truth. As the Israelites faced the impossible to cross Jordan River, Joshua puts the Ark of the Covenant ahead of them for all to see. Oh may we see the manifest presence of God and never run in cowardice from the world system which seeks to conform us to its views and values.

Here is the promise that God gave to them. He said that when the feet of the priests touched the water of the Jordan, the river would stop and they would cross. That is the way God's promises work. We obey and then He acts. We would rather God said, I will part the waters of the Jordan and then you head for the river and cross over. That isn't the way God works. He desires that we walk in dependence on Him and in complete trust in Him, and that we step out in obedient faith at His direction. We say, "Do the miracle and then we will obey," but God says, "You obey and then I will do the miracle." We cannot forget this truth as we seek to fulfill the vision He has given us.

III. The Path for Going Forward by Faith (v 14-17)

This is faith in action. Warren Weirsbe put it this way, “Faith is not a passive feeling; it’s an active force.” [Warren Weirsbe, source unknown]

Faith involves acting on God’s Word. Our definition of faith from Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones is: “Faith is acting like God is telling the truth.” Look at the people known for their faith in Scripture and you will find that there was a path of obedience. It was not just a mental thing. Abraham had faith when he left Ur of the Chaldes and headed for Canaan. Moses had faith and he defied the god’s of Egypt and led the Israelites out of captivity. Gideon had faith and took his small band of 300 men and defeated the Midianite army of over 100,000.

Faith is not just intellectual assent; it involves action. These priests could have stood beside the Jordan for days talking about how that they believed that God could part the Jordan. Nothing would have happened however until they stepped into the Jordan! Look at what God did in response to their faith in His promises:

- The water flow stopped just as God said that it would.
- The wall of water was held in place for probably a whole day (two million people is a lot of people).
- The River bottom was supernaturally dried.
- The flow re-started when everyone was across.

Wow! God fulfills His promises and when you launch out in faith, you will see His promises fulfilled. Was this incident literal or symbolic? There is no reason not to take it literally. Yes, the waters heaped up just as the Scripture says. I have a real problem with people who have a problem with miracles. If you have a problem with miracles, you have a warped and distorted view of God. When you have an accurate view of God, you have absolutely no problem with miracles. Jeremiah 32:27 “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?” The obvious expected answer is “No.”

There are those who say, “I can’t accept anything that contradicts or operates outside the laws of nature.” In reality, there are no “laws of nature.” There are laws of God that control nature. God is not a prisoner of the laws that He has established. We don’t know how God accomplished it. There are cases of earthquakes where rivers have flowed backward (Reel Foot Lake), mud-slides, and other “natural” occurrences. But even if that is how God did it, it was still a miracle because of the timing of it.

Conclusion

In Biblical typology, Canaan represents the Christ filled, Spirit filled life of faith that sees God at work in and through us. It is not a life of sinless perfection or without battles. It is a life that has as its pattern - overcoming and victory. The Jordan River represents going to the next level in our walk with God. It pictures that total surrender and by faith appropriating the cross to our self-life. I am here to plead with you to cross the Jordan and to leave the seeming safety and comfort of the wilderness life to the adventure of glorifying God by wholly following him. Don’t run from God; embrace Him, sanctify yourself, jump in the Jordan, and walk into Canaan.

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