

November 5th, 2017

Scripture:

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

Joshua 3:7-17

Matthew 23:1-12

“And the people passed through all because of God.”

I don't know how many people watched or followed the World Series this year --- I didn't watch as much as usual ---- perhaps because I'm still so depressed by how the Blue Jays performed ---- or didn't perform ---- as the case may be.

But either way --- after the Astro's won --- their first World Series victory in franchise history --- after they won --- one headline I saw read ---

“56 years in the making”

56 years in the making --- the Houston Astro's joined Major League Baseball 56 years ago --- and seeing as this is their first championship --- 56 years in the making makes sense.

For 56 years Astro's fans have waited and watched for this.

So the headline ---- “56 years in the making.” --- got me thinking.

And it got me thinking about the 40 years the Israelites had been wandering and waiting to enter into The Promised Land.

And I thought what about the headline ---- “40 years in the making.”

Today in the book of Joshua the Israelites finally enter into the Promised Land --- 40 years later it finally happens ---- and so --- “40 years in the making.

40 years of waiting --- anticipating --- walking --- wondering ---- doubting -- -- dreaming --- celebrating --- complaining --- you name it they did in the 40 years leading up to this day.

And as one commentator put it ---- it's almost anti-climatic --- it's almost anti-climatic --- the Israelites finally --- after all these years --- enter into the great land promised by God ----- and it happens in just 4 short verses.

The entire Bible --- the first 5 books in their entirety --- Genesis --- Exodus --- Leviticus --- Numbers ----- Deuteronomy ---- have all been pointing to this event --- everything has served as a lead up to this one great galvanizing event ----- this entering into the Promised Land.

And here today in Joshua 3 --- in just 4 verses it finally happens.

“40 years in the making.”

Or from God's perspective ---- hundreds maybe even thousands on thousands of years in the making.

And it ends just like it started.

We all likely know the story of Moses parting the waters --- or really God using Moses to part the waters --- God parting the waters at the Red Sea as the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt.

And then of course when the Egyptians --- Pharaoh and his army follow --- God drops the waters and the Egyptians are swallowed up and the Israelites carry on marching to their freedom --- headed for the Promised Land.

Well today in Joshua 3 as they enter into the Promised Land ---- God once again miraculously parts waters.

And once again God does exactly what He said He would do --- once again God comes through.

Just before our passage today ---- Joshua 3 verse 5 ----

“Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.””

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In other words --- “Get ready ----- because God is about to act.”

And of course that is precisely what happens.

Just as God did amazing things 40 years earlier through Moses ----- now God does amazing things through Joshua.

Picture it ----- the Promised Land is right there ---- right over there --- just the other side of the river.

“It’s right there.”

“But how are we ever going to get over there”.

It’s the high time --- flood season ----- the river is as big and as full and as powerful as it ever is --- verse 15 reads --- “Now the Jordan was at flood stage all during the harvest.”

In other words it’s flooding over --- it’s raging --- it’s as full and as high and as wide and as powerful as it ever gets.

This is no trickle of water -- it is a raging river --- that could sweep you up and swallow you up in an instant.

And if that isn’t enough ---- the point at which they cross is one of the most dangerous because it is just down stream from where all of the tributaries join --- lending all their power and energy to the river.

So you’ve got all the tributaries joining upstream ---- making the power of the water flow it’s fiercest ----- and then you got the water at full spring volume ---- flood stage as verse 15 says.

And God steps in.

Verse 9 reads --- “Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.””

“Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.”

God had just revealed to Joshua what he was to do --- which is put his toes in the Jordan and then God would cut off the water flow at the head waters and allow the people to pass through it --- on dry ground.

So Joshua goes to the people --- the leaders and all the people says to them --
- “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.”

Come and listen ----- not to me --- forget about me --- don't listen to me -----
“Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.”

And so the people listened --- and then they followed.

Listen again to the last 4 verses of our reading from Joshua today --- verses 14 -17.

“So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them.

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, 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.

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.”

The priests stood in the middle of what moments ago was a raging river --- at flood stage.

Imagine that ----- at flood stage they stood in the middle of the river --- and looked upstream watching as the water just froze there.

Man o man I bet their knees were just a knocking at first.

If you've ever been knocked around by slipping in a raging river you'll never forget it --- in an instant you can be turned around and washed away --
- perhaps even killed.

So you can imagine the priests --- knees just a knocking at first ---- and then peace and trust ----- as they stand firm in faith.

And as the final verse in today's reading says ----- they stand firm until every last Israelite had walked past them --- "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."

So the priests stand in the middle of the river ---- and the ground goes dry -- ---- and they remain there holding up the Ark of the Covenant until every single last person passed safely by.

That's God at work

That's covenant fulfilled.

They wade into the water --- hold up the ark ----- and the waters dry up ---- they are cut off ---- and the people pass by --- walking past the very presence of the Lord --- and they walk up onto the shore into The Promised Land.

What a powerful image of trust and faith.

What a powerful image of the sovereignty of God.

God stands right in the middle of the raging chaos ---- and stops everything - --- and the people pass through safely.

God is right there with the people --- in the middle of the raging waters --- and they pass through unscathed --- dry and safe and at peace --- into the home He has had waiting for them for over 40 years.

In Deuteronomy chapter 34 ---- the very end of the book --- as Moses dies -- - and just before Joshua is installed as the new leader --- we have these great and powerful words ----- "For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all of Israel."

"For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all of Israel."

And Joshua ----- in the very same breath that these words about Moses are uttered --- performs a similar great and powerful act himself.

Why would God say something like no one has done what Moses did – and then in the same breath have someone do just that --- do something as great and powerful as Moses did?

Why these words ---- if something is about to happen that almost seems to go against them?

And the answer is simple --- because it is God who is the prime actor --- and He can do anything with anyone ---- and any situation.

Right away --- so that the people won't start some kind of idolatry --- Moses was awesome --- Moses was great ---- Moses did wonderful things ---- “For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all of Israel.”

God acts --- right away --- swiftly and powerfully --- and decisively ---- reminding the people that it is He that can do anything.

Reminding the people that just as He parted the waters in Egypt --- so He can --- and will --- and does ---- part the waters once again ---- in the Jordan River this time using Joshua as His agent.

Yes Moses was great ---yes Joshua is great --- yes the priests are incredible in their courage and faith.

But God is the architect.

God is the one behind it all ---- and through it all --- and in it all.

Gad has been preparing the Israelites for this crossing for a very very long time.

God has been preparing the readers of the Bible --- us as we read through Genesis ---- and Exodus --- and Leviticus ----- and Numbers and especially Deuteronomy --- God has been preparing us for this crossing for a very long time.

And still today God can and does prepare us for certain “crossing overs.”

By great and mighty acts at the hands of God ----- through courageous and faithful leadership ----- by walking in faith ---- trusting in their leaders --- trusting in God ---- the people seize the land of promise --- and enter into the goodness of God.

That’s the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today.

By trusting --- by walking in faith --- by looking up to their leaders who were looking up to God ----- the people cross over into a new era --- a new land --- a new God blessed reality.

They could have stood on the side of the raging river and said something like -----

“No way ----- can’t be done ---- we will be swallowed up and washed away if we take a step in there --- those waters will not hold off forever --- I’m not going in only to be killed and washed away.”

But when the priests ---- when God ----- went before them --- they followed.

The passed through --- they entered into what they had been longing to enter into for over 40 years ---- they entered into what God had in mind for them all along --- the place of promise ---- The Promised Land.

With God anything is possible.

In one of our praise songs we sing ----- “He can move the mountains...” --- in fact if you’re here next week we will sing that --- so come again --- same time same place ----- next week.

“He can move the mountains ...” ----- what we mean when we sing He can move the mountains is this ---- “He can move the mountains.”

It’s not just He can move big things --- or He can move things that seem impossible to move ----- it isn’t just a sweet little metaphor for the strength of God ----- it means ----- “He can move mountains...”

We still call huge unexplainable things ----- “Acts of God.”

Even non-believers do.

Try making an insurance claim for something weather derived ---- “Oh sorry sir --- we can’t help you with that --- that’s an act of God --- we can’t cover that.”

Of course that can’t be covered or explained or rectified by human hands ---- it is after all an Act of God.

Stopping the waters at their strongest point ---- just after all the tributaries joined into the river.

Stopping the waters at their strongest point ----- and at the strongest time in the season ---- the flood stage ---- is nothing short of the miracle that is the resurrection.

In fact it points directly to the resurrection.

Because God takes impossible circumstances and simply changes them just like that ----- in an instant.

He can move the mountains for sure.

And He can cut off this river --- at its strongest point --- during its strongest time of the season ----- just like that.

And not only that He can hold it there for hours.

Every trickle of water stopped that day --- and for quite a long time too.

After all a whole tribe of people --- a whole nation ----- men ---- women --- children --- babies --- girls boys ---- donkeys --- lambs --- cows ---- camels - --- tents --- pots pans --- and so on --- walked right on through with the river bed at their feet --- bone dry.

And God did it ----- and God can still do it.

God can move the mountains --- He can stop the rivers from flowing --- and He can make life out of death.

It's incredible what God can do --- when we give over --- and get out of His way.

Clear the path for God --- get rid of the obstacles and He will make the rivers stop --- and He will clear a pathway for us to cross over into something more beautiful --- and more true ----- and life giving than we could ever imagine.

Joshua said to the Israelites ---- this is verse 9 from our Old Testament reading today --- "Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words the Lord your God."

When we listen for and then to God speaking ----- He can and will part the rivers.

He will get rid of whatever obstacles that stands between us and what He wants for us.

I can well imagine the people standing at the river Jordan looking over into The Promised Land.

Them here ----- the land of promise there ---- and this raging river between them.

Joshua may have looked back at the people ---- babies --- children ---- chickens----- lambs --- camels --- cows --- and so on.

And thought --- "Oh man ---- we'll never get there ---- over there --- it's right under our nose ----- but we'll never get there ---- we just can't --- look at this raging river --- it will swallow us up --- it's in flood stage."

"Moses is gone --- he just died ---- no one has ever shown the mighty power and performed the deeds that

Enter God.

God had been preparing the Israelites for this crossing for a long time --- some river ----- raging or not ---- isn't going to get in the way and stop Him.

In humility Joshua remained faithful ----- and the people were lifted up.

As we just sang humble thyself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.

In His great and infinite power God acted.

What seemed utterly impossible by human standards was like a snap of the fingers for God.

The water was cut off --- and the people passed through.

Raging waters on all sides ---- bone dry --- down the middle ---- and all the people passed through.

And all because of God.

He can move the mountains --- He can bring what looks dead ---- what is even totally dead back to life.

He can do the "impossible."

Even when we can't possibly see a way ---- He has many ---- many ways to get us wherever it is that He wants us to go.

And the people passed through all because of God.

And the people still pass through all because of God.

Amen.