

NEW GROUND

Title: Part 4 – “Cross Over for a Reason”

Date: September 6, 2026

As we continue in this moment of worship and prepare for the teaching of God’s Word, let’s PAUSE and get still for just a second. Everyone close your eyes and take a deep, slow breath with me. Now, into this quiet, I want you to give God everyone and everything—every person you’re carrying, every worry you walked in with, every outcome you can’t control. Just open your hands and hand it all up to God because He cares for you. God, we give you everyone and everything.

[PRAYER TIME]

Hey, before you grab a seat, take thirty seconds and say “Hi” to the people around you, tell them you’re glad they showed up today. AND while everyone is saying “Hi” here in the house I want to say “Hi” to our church family joining us online, we’re glad you’re here! We’d love to pray for you and walk with you. So, reach out and let us know how we can serve you through the Care & Prayer tab on our app.

Speaking of our app, I mentioned this a couple weeks ago, but our app just had it’s **1,000th download**! How awesome is that? It takes a lot of behind-the-scenes work and financial resources to keep this content coming and get it into people’s hands—but when you think about the potential reach—it makes it all worth it! Amen?

If you have access to a Bible in print or on your phone, meet me in **John 12**. John chapter 12. And while you’re finding that, lean over to somebody and tell them, “There’s a reason.” There’s a reason!

We are coming in for a landing in our collection of messages called New Ground, and here’s the whole idea one more time: everybody’s got a season where everything changes all at once and nobody hands you a map. Right? A new job, new school, new relationship, a baby, retirement, the death of a loved on... Over the past four weeks we’ve stood at the edge of the river and learned to take the first step, even though we are afraid. We learned you can’t cross with your hands full, so we grieved and we let go of the old season. Last week we sat in the middle of the river (or more specifically the Upper Room) and said the middle is not a mistake, so don’t you dare bail three days before the fire falls. If you missed any of that, as always, you can catch up on our app or website.

Today, we finish the crossing into New Ground. Let me read our text. Jesus says this the week He’s going to die, when everything in Him could have been looking for an exit. John 12, verse 23:

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Missionary E. Stanley Jones, echoing the sentiments of Jesus in dying to ourselves, once said:

"We never live until we have gone to our own funeral. Crucifixion with Christ is resurrection in yourself."

SO, today I want to preach a message I am calling:

Cross Over for a Reason

For three weeks now we have been talking about the transition into a new season. We started this off with Joshua and the people of Israel standing at the flooded Jordan River. On the other side, on the far bank, was the New Ground, the Promised Land. BUT let's pause here, zoom out to 30,000 feet, and ask a question we don't even think about most of the time. When you find yourself walking into something new:

What is it for?

That's a good question, right? Because here is how most of us, me included, think about a new season of life. We think the whole point is US! The new job is about my advancement. The new house is about my peace and comfort. The new baby is about my happiness and purpose. The fresh start is about my healing, my next-level life. And don't misunderstand what I am saying here. God cares about all of that. He's a good Father; He gives good gifts.

BUT if the only reason you crossed the river was to get a slightly upgraded version of your life on the other side... I think you crossed for too small a reason. I think you went through all of that death and grief and disorientation for a payoff that's way beneath what God had in mind.

Because God almost never moves you just for you. When God called Abraham to new ground, He said, "I'll bless you," but then He said the reason, "So that you will be a blessing," so that "all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you." The blessing

was never the destination. The blessing was the platform. God blesses you **TO** something, not just *with* something.

But we forget that so fast, don't we? We pray these prayers that are all about us—God, get me the job, God, help me get married, God, give me the fresh start... and there's nothing wrong with those prayers, except that they stop short! We ask God to bless the new ground, but we never once ask what the new ground is for.

And I've done it too. I'm not pointing the finger today because I have crossed into new seasons of my life absolutely convinced the whole thing was about me and my comfort and my next big thing. It took me an embarrassingly long time to look up and realize God had moved me to new ground to serve and reach new people. That was the point, that was the purpose. We treat the harvest that Jesus talked about in Luke 10 like it's a nice little bonus, BUT God treats the harvest like it's the whole point!

SO, the question for today—as we put a bookend on this—is NOT “did you cross?” The question is “what did you cross FOR?” And I want to give you three answers from the text. Here is number one, write this down if you are taking notes:

1. You cross the same water, but you are not the same.

Write that down. You cross the same water, but YOU are not the same.

You don't have to turn there, but before we get back to Jesus words let's take a detour way back in 2 Kings chapter 2. Here is the scene, the prophet Elijah is about to be taken up to heaven, and his protégé Elisha refuses to leave his side. So, Elijah turns to him and says, “What can I do for you before I'm taken from you?” And Elisha says this bold thing, verse 9:

“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied.

Now, we hear that phrase, “double portion,” today and we think Elisha is asking to be twice as powerful as Elijah, like he wants an upgrade, a bigger anointing than his mentor. BUT that's not it at all. In that culture, the “double portion” was a legal term, it was the inheritance that went specifically to the firstborn son. See, the firstborn got a double share of the estate, because he was the heir, the one who would carry on the father's name and the family's mission. So, Elisha isn't asking for more power. He's asking to be treated as the heir. He's saying, “Let me carry on what you started. Put the family business in my hands.”

And then it happens. Verse 11:

¹¹ As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. [Now, watch what Elisha does, first he tears his old clothing in two, he is saying goodbye to his old life, then he picks up the mantle, the cloak that fell from Elijah, the symbol of his calling, verse 13] ¹³ Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. [Same Jordan River as Joshua had once stood with 2 million Hebrews that would become the nation of Israel, now watch this] ¹⁴ He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" he asked. [This is the question that I think we ask at every new beginning: "Where now is the Lord?" Where is He? Is the God who showed up for the last guy going to show up for me? Is the God who got me here going to be God on the new ground too? Then get ready for this, he takes the cloak and] When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

I know there is a lot going on there, but I want you to understand again what was happening when Elisha picked the cloak up off the ground. This was not a souvenir! This was God's calling. It was the same mantle Elijah had thrown over Elisha's shoulders years before, the day he first called him to leave his oxen and follow. And now it falls to him completely, and Elisha has a decision to make. Pick it up and carry it or leave it lying there in the dirt and go back to his comfortable old life plowing his father's fields.

See, here's the thing you've got to understand about a mantle, it is never really yours. It gets handed to you. You carry it for your stretch of the road and then one day you hand it on to somebody coming up behind you.

SO, when God moves you onto new ground, He is not just handing you a blessing to sit on and enjoy. He's handing you a mantle to carry! There is a weight to what He has put in your hands.

God does a miracle and Elisha crossed the very same river Joshua crossed back in week one, the exact same water, BUT he did not cross it the same man. He crossed it through letting go of the old, he crossed it carrying a mantle, and he crossed it as an heir with a mission. The God who parted the water for Joshua parted it again for Elisha, because the far bank is never new territory for God! You've never been this way before BUT He's been this way the whole time!

SO, maybe you're standing on new ground this morning asking Elisha's question. Where is God now? Is He going to be as real over here as He was back there? And the answer of this whole Book is yes! The water still parts. The God of your last chapter is the God

of your next one. **BUT** you're not crossing for an upgrade. You're crossing as an heir, with a mantle, for a mission. You cross the same water, but you don't cross the same.

Which brings me to the hardest, strangest part of how a new beginning actually works.

2. The only way up is down.

Write it down, the only way up is down... Back to our text now from John 12, hopefully that detour was helpful. Look again at what Jesus said in verse 24:

²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Think about how backwards that is. If you've got a single seed, and that seed is precious to you, what's your instinct? Protect it, right? Put it somewhere safe. Set it on a shelf where nothing can hurt it. BUT you know what happens to a seed you protect on a shelf? Nothing! Absolutely nothing. It stays exactly what it is, a single seed. It'll be sitting there perfectly preserved and perfectly useless a hundred years from now. The only way that seed becomes anything more than one seed is if you do the thing that feels like throwing it away, you bury it! You put it into the earth and let it crack open and fall apart and die. BUT that death in the dirt is the only doorway to a harvest.

Jesus is saying the law of the Kingdom is the law of the seed, life comes through death, up comes through down, multiplication comes through what looks like loss. AND He's not just talking about wheat. Look at verse 25:

²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

He's talking about you and me. He's saying there is a version of you that has to go into the ground so that the real harvest can come up.

AND if you have been here, this is the thing we've been circling for four weeks. Every transition has a death in it. Some big, some small. In week one we find Moses lying dead in the first verse. In week two we said every ending is a little funeral. Then—remember the caterpillar—the middle feels like you're dissolving into goo. AND now we know why! All the little and big deaths of transition are not the tragedy of new beginnings, that is the mechanism of it! The death isn't the thing blocking your new life, the death is the seed of your new life!

Think about it, what was Jesus ultimately talking about in John 12? He was talking about what was going to happen to Him on the cross. When Jesus went into that tomb, it looked like the end of the story. It looked like the seed got buried and that was that. But

Sunday morning, the seed came up, and it didn't come up as one seed, it came up as a harvest that's still being gathered two thousand years later, in this room, right now! You are the fruit of a seed that was willing to die!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who bravely opposed the Nazi regime in Germany, said it like this:

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

That sounds like the worst invitation in the world until you understand the law of the seed. He's not calling you to death because He wants to take your life. He's calling you to death because it's the only door to the harvest, and He walked through the biggest death first to prove it leads somewhere.

SO, here's how this applies to you and I today. That little death you're standing in right now as you cross over into new ground—the empty bedroom, the closed chapter, the you that you used to be, in some cases the freedom you once enjoyed—hear me, that is not waste. In the God's economy, that is all seed. Stop treating it like a dead end. God is not standing over the grave of your old season wringing His hands. He's the one who created the laws of the universe, He knows exactly what a buried seed becomes.

AND I do want to be sensitive here, because some of you are walking in this morning and all you can see is the dirt. You are still in the dark as to what God is doing. So, I don't want to stand over you and chirp, “Cheer up, it's just a seed!” That's not helpful, right? But what is helpful is that I, and many others in this room, will stand here and believe it for you until you can, that what is buried in your life is not gone, it is planted. And God has never, not one time, lost a harvest.

Once you understand that, then you're finally free to answer the biggest question of all, write this down:

3. Cross over for a reason bigger than you.

Write it down. Cross over for a reason bigger than you.

Go back to the seed one more time in John 12. When that seed dies and produces “many seeds,” who are the many seeds for? Not for the original seed. The original seed is gone, in the ground. The harvest is for everybody else. **The seed dies so that others get fed.** And that, church, is the reason you cross. The fruit of your new season was never meant to stop with you.

Last week we kind of left off on a cliffhanger. Remember? We left the disciples in the upper room, without Jesus, in the middle, in the silence, and I begged you to stay in the

room until the fire falls, the promise of the Holy Spirit. Well, if you turn the page to Acts chapter 2. The middle ends, look at verse 2:

² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [or more accurately, languages] as the Spirit enabled them.

The power Jesus had promised, that they had been waiting ten long days for, finally shows up! AND this is 100% new ground for the disciples!

BUT come on, what did they do with the power the second they got it? Did they sit in the upper room and just enjoy it? Did they have a nice private worship service and just soak in the presence? No! The doors flew open and they spilled out into the street, verse 5:

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

AND Peter—the guy who denied Jesus three times a few weeks earlier—preaches his heart out, and verse 41 says this:

⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Three thousand people baptized and the Church was born, and it has been expanding ever since for 2,000 years!

BECAUSE the power was never for the upper room. The fire didn't fall so they could feel warm. It fell so that a harvest could come in. And the same is true of every ounce of anointing, every new season, every open-door God has ever given you! It was never just so you'd be comfortable on the far bank! It was so the fire in you could light a fire in somebody else!

Have you ever noticed you can light a thousand candles off of one flame and the first candle loses nothing? That's the Kingdom. That's a life that crossed over onto new ground for a reason. You don't get dimmer by setting other people on fire. You were lit to be lit FROM! Put that on a shirt! You were lit to be lit FROM!

There was a missionary in the 1950's named Jim Elliot. He and four other young missionaries flew into the jungle of Ecuador to reach a tribe that had never heard the name of Jesus. This tribe was known to be so violent that outsiders didn't dare go near them. Elliot and his small team landed anyway but on the bank of the river, those five men were speared to death. Every one of them killed. From the outside it looked like the ultimate waste. Five bright young lives, gone.

But that's not where the story ends. Because Jim Elliot's widow, Elisabeth, and the sister of another of the men, they went back! They went and lived among the very tribe that killed their husband and brother. And over the years, that tribe met Jesus. The men who threw the spears became brothers in Christ. The seed that fell in the ground on that riverbank came up as a harvest nobody could've imagined.

Years before he died, Jim Elliot had written a line in his journal that turned out to be his whole life, he wrote:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

That's a man who crossed over for a reason bigger than himself, amen?

SO, here is the question today that we need to wrestle with:

Who is your new ground for?

When God moves you into new ground, there is always somebody standing on that far bank who needs what you're carrying. A new coworker who's never seen a Christian who wasn't a hypocrite. A new neighbor. A hurting friend. Your own kids, watching how you handle the hard things. You didn't just cross for you. You crossed so that the fire in you could fall on somebody else.

God did not bring you through all that uncertainty and death and grief and silence just to leave you standing there admiring the scenery on the other side of the river. He brought you across to bear fruit! To be a witness! To carry the mantle! The harvest is the reason!

Listen to me, the enemy would love nothing more than for you to cross into a brand-new season and waste the whole thing on yourself. To get you so fixated on your own comfort, your own healing, your own upgrade, that the harvest standing right in front of you goes unreached. Don't let him! You have been through way too much to cross over for so little. You buried too many seeds, said goodbye to too many good things, sat in too much silence, to get to the far bank and make it all about you! Cross over for a reason! Cross over for the harvest! Cross over for the ones God is going to put on your

bank who will only ever meet Jesus because you were willing to carry the fire across the water!

SO, as we close this out, I want to connect the past two message collections, because some of you have been on this whole journey with us. Before New Ground, we spent the summer in The Waiting Room. In it we learned what to do when God says STAY—when nothing moves, when you're stuck in the chair, when the answer is just... wait.

The past four weeks have been the other half of that. Because sometimes God does not say stay, sometimes God says GO, CROSS! New Ground has been about the motion, how to grieve and release and step into the deep water and go.

And here's what I want you to walk out with, because I think it's the most important thing I can give you. The hardest part of following God is almost never the staying or the crossing itself. The hardest part is knowing which one He's asking for right now. Because our instinct is often backwards, amen? When God says wait, we want to force it and run ahead. And when God says cross, we freeze on the bank because we're scared.

One of the marks of spiritual maturity is learning to tell the difference between a season to be still and a season to move. Between The Waiting Room and the New Ground.

So how do you tell? You simply stay close enough to the ark (the presence of God) to see which way it's going. You keep your hands open. You do the deep work in the middle. And you trust that the God of Elijah, the God of the seed, the God who turns Fridays into Sundays, is leading you either way.

Because there is no formula. I wish I could hand you a flowchart. But mostly it comes down to one hard question:

Am I refusing to move because God actually said wait, or because I'm afraid?

Because those are two completely different things, and only you and God know which one is really running the show. Fear disguises itself as wisdom all the time. "I'm just being patient" can be deeply holy, or it can be cowardice wearing a really nice coat. And it cuts the other way too:

Is my restlessness the Spirit of God saying go, or is it just my unwillingness to stay long enough to be formed?

Here's the good news: the Waiting Room and New Ground both require the exact same thing underneath. A heart that wants what God wants more than it wants its own

comfort or its own control. Get that heart, keep surrendering until you've got that heart, and you will almost always know which season you're standing in.

As we close, there's a kind of pinecone from the giant sequoia trees out west that will not open and release their seeds until they've been through a fire. The thing that looks like it's destroying the forest is the only thing hot enough to crack the cone, melt the resin, and plant the next generation. The fire that looks like the end is actually the beginning of the tallest trees on earth.

Friend, that is our God! He is always, always making new things out of what looks like the end. John Eldredge writes about this, that the deepest promise of the Gospel isn't escape, it's **restoration**; that God is in the business of making all things new, not someday off in the clouds, but starting now, in the middle of your actual life.

If you're here today and you've never crossed over to Jesus, hear me, this is the day. The cross is God's proof, nailed up where everybody can see it, that He makes beginnings out of endings. Jesus went into the ground as a single seed so you could be part of the harvest. Whatever's died in you, whatever's broken, whatever you think disqualifies you—that is exactly the kind of thing He raises. You don't have to fix it first. You just have to cross. Today's the day to step into the water.

And for those of you who've walked with Him for years, the question isn't whether you'll cross into your next season. You will. The question is what you'll cross FOR. Will you steward this new ground for His glory, or just for your own comfort? Who's the harvest on the other side of your river? Because you were blessed to be a blessing, you were lit to be lit FROM, you were planted to bear much fruit.

So, don't just cross over and settle. Don't get to the far bank, unpack your boxes, get comfortable, and forget there was ever a reason you made the trip. Keep your eyes up! Keep your hands open! Stay ready to be spent! Because a life poured out for the harvest is the only kind of life that ever comes back to you multiplied!

It's the paradox Jesus is inviting you into: you keep your life by giving it away.

Would you pray with me.

[PRAYER TIME]