

# **All-In 2023**

January 1, 2023

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Happy New Year! There are some things you can't do part-way; it's either "all-in" or nothing. Like bungee-jumping. There is a turning point moment when you are on the edge of the bridge with the cord attached. You've got to choose. You can't try bungee jumping part-way down just to see if you like it. You're either standing there not bungee-jumping or you're in the air. There's no in between! A few years ago my son Daniel did a bungee jump off a bridge. So how many of you think, "I'd like to do that – it looks like fun?" How many of you say, "No way! Don't come near me with that giant elastic band." There's no right answer, it's just personal preference, but there isn't an in between. If you want to have the adrenaline rush of free falling off a bridge and living to tell about it, you've got to go "all-in." Reading the Bible we see there are times God asks people to go all-in with him in order to see him do something amazing. Joshua 3 is one of those times.

Joshua 3 records a major turning point in the history of Israel; they weren't just starting a new year -- they were starting a new era as a nation. A bit of back story: The Jews were slaves in Egypt for 400 years until God directed Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. But they didn't go straight into the land God promised. Instead, they wandered in the desert for 40 years. The adults who came out of Egypt died during this time, including Moses himself. Then God appointed Joshua to succeed Moses as the new leader. Joshua had been Moses' apprentice. Moses led the people out of Egypt; Joshua would lead the people into the Promised Land. So in Joshua 3, God told Joshua that the big moment had arrived. The people were finally going to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land that they'd dreamed about for 40 years. Finally it was going to happen. Instead of living in tents they would finally build their own houses, plant their own crops and put down roots. **Joshua 3:1-3** *Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. <sup>2</sup> After three days the officers went throughout the camp, <sup>3</sup> giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God,*

*and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.*

The people were going to follow the Ark of the Covenant into their new life. The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-covered wooden box that contained the two stone tablets of the 10 Commandments that God had given Moses and also Aaron's rod and some manna. The Jews preserved the 10 commandment tablets as reminders of the *covenant* God had made with them. "Covenant" is not a word we use a lot today. A covenant is a solemn agreement where two parties make vows which creates a relationship. Each party has privileges and responsibilities in the relationship. Its similar to what we call a contract today but not exactly. The covenant God made with the Jews was, "I will be your God and you will be my people." The tablets with the 10 commandments were in the Ark of the Covenant to remind Israel of their responsibilities as God's people. Obeying the commandments was their part in their covenant relationship with God.

Today our relationship with God is also based on a covenant, but ours is the New Covenant. Our relationship with God is no longer based on our ability to obey the 10 Commandments. The New Covenant is based on our commitment to trust in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross which leads us to a deeper obedience to the 10 commandments. The New Covenant God made with us is through Jesus. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and said, *This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:20)* Now we have a new covenant relationship with God. And just like the Israelites followed the Ark of the Covenant into the Promised Land, following our covenant leads us into our future. John Wesley was founder of the Methodist movement. Wesley believed that all Christians should reaffirm their covenant with God once per year, so in 1755 he created a service in which individual believers renew their covenant with God. Later in today's service we're going to do what those early Methodists did; renew our covenant with God through the historic Wesley Covenant prayer.

God told Joshua that after 40 years, the time had come to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. He was finally going to bring them into their own land where they would be free! **Joshua 3:4-5**

*<sup>4</sup> Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it.* They were going into territory they didn't know but by following the Ark of the Covenant, they wouldn't get lost. Then Joshua told the people how to prepare for this major moment in their lives. *<sup>5</sup> Joshua told the people, **“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.”*** They weren't just to pack their belongings, they were to “consecrate” their hearts.

In fact, that is what the Lord is telling us at the beginning of 2023 - “consecrate yourselves.” What does that mean? “Consecrated” = “completely designated for a special purpose.” For example: you might have dress shoes for going out. You'd never wear them to cut the grass. They are set apart; consecrated. This Communion chalice is a special cup. It is set apart for one use only: sharing Communion together. We don't use it for anything else. We don't grab it to drink a Coke while watching the game. We don't use it as a nail holder. It is consecrated – set apart --- for serving Communion. You and I have been created exclusively for God. We are specially designated for knowing and loving God. When we use our bodies in ways God says not to it damages our ability to live for God. That's why **Romans 12:1** says, *I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.* When we value anything more than God, it distorts our lives. If we pursue pleasure, money, or reputation more than God, it dulls our hearts. That's why Jesus said the greatest commandment is, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37)* God tells us to consecrate ourselves; set ourselves apart for God's special purposes. When we do that, God will do amazing things.

The Jews were going into a land that was already occupied and would need the power of God to help them take possession of the land. They didn't know it at the time, but they were going to see amazing things as they conquered the land. They were going to see city walls fall at the sound of trumpets. They were going to see the sun stand still during a battle. They didn't know all that at the time, but Joshua told them that if they consecrated themselves - if they went all-in, they would see God do amazing things. I believe God is

telling us the same thing as we enter 2023; “consecrate yourselves; go all-in, for in 2023 the Lord will do amazing things among you.”

**When we go all-in, God will do amazing things.** Notice it is God who does the amazing things not us. Mark Batterson wrote that “many of us would love to do great things for God - but that isn’t our job: it is God’s job. Our job is to consecrate ourselves.” This takes the pressure off us! God never asks us to do the impossible; he asks us to commit ourselves fully to him and then HE will do the impossible. Where do you want to see God’s power in your life?

- Do you want to see your addictions broken?
- Do you want to get out of debt?
- Experience deeper peace?
- Do you want to see God use your life to reach and bless others?
- Do you want to see relationships healed?

God can do more than we ask or imagine in 2023, if we will consecrate ourselves; go all-in with him. The Bible says this and history shows it. John Wesley once said, *“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth.”* Well, he got his 100 preachers, and they literally changed the world!

Wesley’s commitment to do whatever God asked sparked a fire of spiritual awakening that changed the world. So many people were changed by Christ under his ministry that England itself was changed. Some historians credit the revival movement with saving England from a revolution like what took place in France. They were committed and saw God do amazing things. Today I hear Christians passionately arguing for their political positions and candidates to save this nation by voting in a certain way. But friends, it is the power of God working through committed Christ-followers that changes lives, communities, and nations. All-in disciples have a passion for Jesus and his purposes on earth that is greater than their political passions. And today there are people all over the globe who are all-in for God and see him do amazing things. Most of these servants will never be written about in a book or appear in a video.

Recently I've communicated through a third party with a believer who is risking his life planting cell groups in a nation where Christianity is illegal. One of his co-workers was martyred. But he is determined to continue because he is all-in. *All-in*. There are anonymous men and women in Africa who are quietly serving Jesus by serving the needs of starving children and poor families. Watch what will happen this year if we are a group of people who, "Fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God." What if that phrase describes our lives this year? Fearing nothing but sin and desiring nothing but God would simplify our decision-making, wouldn't it?

**People who are all-in let God lead.** Joshua told the people to *follow* the Ark of the Covenant. They were not to get out in front of it and try to take it where they wanted to go. <sup>6</sup> *Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.* Because the people consecrated themselves, they followed. As a result, they got to see God work in amazing ways! For example, they camped around the highly fortified city of Jericho. On their own they never would have chosen to camp there because Jericho appeared impossible to conquer. But God said to do it, so they did. Then God said to march around the city once a day for 6 days - so they did. They wouldn't have thought of that strategy themselves and they never used that strategy again, but because God said to do it, they did. On the seventh day God commanded them to march around the city 7 times and then shout at Joshua's command; and they saw the walls of Jericho fall down!

Maybe you'll have a fantastic year with lots of success – let's follow the Lord's direction in how to handle that well. Maybe you'll face a battle for health or career or confidence or a relationship. Go all-in with God. Let him lead you. Listen first. Let him guide. Let God call the shots, give God veto power over your plans and decisions. What do you have planned for 2023? Submit that to God. As you start each day, what if you asked God to guide you in each of the events on your agenda -- even your recreation? What if you invite God to put ideas in your mind for what he wants you to be doing? Who he wants you to serve? Go all-in.

This past May a passenger with no flight experience called the Air Traffic Control Tower at the Fort Pierce, Florida airport and said, “I’ve got a serious situation here. My pilot has gone incoherent. I have no idea how to fly the airplane.” This sort of thing happens in the movies all the time, but not in real life. An air traffic controller named Robert Morgan was outside the tower reading a book on a break when his co-worker yelled, “There’s a passenger flying a plane that’s not a pilot and the pilot is incapacitated so they said you need to help them land the plane.” But he was the right man for the job. Not only was he a 20-year veteran in tower control, but also a flight instructor with around 1,200 hours experience. Morgan later said, “...I just knew I had to keep him calm, point him to the runway and tell him how to reduce the power so he could descend to land.” Then Morgan walked the passenger step-by-step through the landing procedure.” It worked. Morgan said, “The man said he told me that he couldn’t wait to get home and hug his pregnant wife.”<sup>1</sup> That passenger survived because he did exactly what he was told. Can you imagine him hearing instructions from the tower but then saying, “Thanks for the suggestions, but I feel like trying something different.” or “Yeah, that might be good for you, but I need to fly my own truth.” The story wouldn’t have turned out so well. That passenger-turned-pilot was fully committed to doing exactly what he was instructed to do. That’s a good perspective for us to take this year; follow through on the directions we get from the tower in heaven.

### **People who are all-in take a step before seeing**

It was one thing for the Israelites to follow the ark, but it was something else to say “yes” when they weren’t sure what would happen! The Israelites needed to cross the Jordan River. In verse 8 God told Joshua to have the priests go stand in the Jordan River. *Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.* The river was at flood stage, so that was dangerous. Then Joshua told everyone that God is going to stop the river from flowing so they could cross. But here’s the catch; they had to step into the water before it would stop. Joshua told the priests to take the ark and stand in the flooding river. The priests probably thought, “We’ll step in *after* the water stops flowing.” But that is not the way obedience works, that’s not the way

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.businesskhabar.com/business/opinion/untrained-passenger-lands-airplane/>

faith works. First step in the water, *then* it stops. *Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, <sup>16</sup> the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, .... <sup>17</sup> 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.* They acted and then saw God do an amazing thing! But first they had to go all-in and do whatever God said! This year you will have the opportunity to act on what God says. Understand that often you will have to take a step before you know how it will turn out.

Forgive before you feel like it.

Give even when you aren't sure how it will work out.

Say "yes" to the opportunity to serve before you know if you'll be good at it.

Pray before you know if it will be answered.

This week we'll start a 21-day prayer focus as a church family. Let's see what God will do!

Let's begin 2023 by expressing to God our readiness to go all-in with him. In a few minutes we are going to invite you to join in John Wesley's yearly re-commitment prayer to the Lord called the Wesley Covenant prayer. We're going to pray it aloud together at the start of this new year then we will share communion. It's not a prayer to say lightly or casually. In fact, I'd suggest that if you don't mean it, don't pray it. But if you do mean it and want it to be true in your life, then get ready; the Lord is going to do amazing things!

***I am no longer my own, but thine.***

***Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.***

***Put me to doing, put me to suffering.***

***Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.***

***Let me be full, let me be empty.***

***Let me have all things, let me have nothing.***

***I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.***

***And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.***

***And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.***

Come to Communion in an attitude of all-in for the one who gave it all for us.