

**Promise Land I  
November 18, 2012**

**Prelude Beautiful One**

**Worship Beautiful One  
How Deep the Father's Love**

**Message Pt. 1 Ladell, The "C" Word**

**Communion "Jesus I Come"**

**Introduction**

Can you think back to a time when you waited for something with great anticipation and excitement? Most of us can. As a child, Christmas and birthdays were just such days for me growing up. My birthday is on December 16<sup>th</sup>, and so as a kid, my excitement would build throughout the year with each passing holiday. First came Labor Day in September, then Halloween in

October, then Thanksgiving in November. By the time Thanksgiving rolled around, I could hardly wait for my birthday to arrive. And of course when Christmas arrived, that was just the icing on the cake! As you can tell, this time of year is very special to me.

We all face situations like this where we sometimes have to wait a long time for something. Life is full of them. Some bring excitement and some nervous anticipation. Each situation brings its own unique blend of exhilaration or anxiety as you wait months, weeks, or days for that moment to finally arrive.

Can you imagine the anticipation and excitement the children of Israel felt as they

stood before the River Jordan the evening before they crossed over into the Promised Land? The earlier generation had failed to enter because of unbelief and the new generation had waited a long time. For some it was close to forty years. For Joshua and Caleb, who were now about eighty years old, the wait had been even longer. In reality, Jewish anticipation of a Promised Land dated back some five hundred years to the covenant God made with Abraham.

It would be a huge understatement to say that they were excited and a bit nervous as they camped and waited beside the Jordan River. They were about to make one of the biggest, most anticipated changes of their entire lives. Their lives would never be the same after this event.

Today, I want us to take a look at the final 24 hours leading up to Israel's entry into the Promised Land. As we examine this historic event, I'm going to make some observations about their experience. Specifically we'll look at how they anticipated and prepared for this major change and what can we learn from their example.

### Review

Before we jump into the message, I want to remind all of you that we are in the middle of a series called "Promised Land." During this series, Rick has used the Old Testament account of Israel's journey into the Promised Land as a metaphor for what we are going through as a church as we prepare for our grand opening in January. We've been following the journey of the Israelites from

the time they left their captivity in Egypt, to where we pick up the story today, on the banks of the Jordan River. Now today we are going to do something a little different. Today, instead of me talking the whole time, I'm going to share the platform with Shannon. I'll do the first half of the message and Shannon will do the second half. And we will have a time of communion half way between. It should be fun. With that said, let's dive into the Scriptures and what we can learn from Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land.

### Joshua and the "C" word

I'm going to begin by reading in Joshua 3:1-5.

*Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." (Joshua 3:1-5 ESV)*

As I said a minute ago, for the last few weeks Rick's been tracing the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. At this point in the story, they are just about to enter into the land. Before I make some general observations about what's going here, there are a few things I want to explain and some terminology I want to define.

*First, in verse 1, it says that Joshua brought them to the Jordan and they lodged there for three days.* Now if you remember last week's message, Israel had sent out two spies a few days prior to gather intelligence about the hostile territory they were about to enter. During their reconnaissance mission, the spies ran into Rahab the harlot in the city

of Jericho. (Check out Rick's message about Rahab on our website) Jericho would be the first hostile city the Israelites would face once they crossed the Jordan River.

## **Jordan River**

I want you to give a sense of the geography in this story. The Jordan River forms a large natural boundary between Transjordan on the east, where Joshua and the Israelites were camped, and the land of Canaan, where Jericho was located, on the west.

Since there were no bridges in this area during ancient times, the Jordan River was generally impossible to cross except by swimming, or wading across at shallow areas when the water conditions were just

right. Between the Sea of Galilee in the north and the Dead Sea in the south, there were just few places where the Jordan could be crossed. One such place was near Jericho and this is why Israel was camped there.

*The next thing I want you to notice, in verses 2-4, is that Joshua's officers told the people to wait for the Ark of the Covenant to come by and then to follow after it. Once the Levitical priests passed by the people with the Ark, the Israelites were supposed to get up and follow it, but they were told to remain 2,000 cubits or about half a mile behind it at all times. This whole scene seems a bit strange if you don't understand the significance of the Ark of the Covenant. What exactly is this Ark and why was it so*

important? Simply put, the Ark of the Covenant was Israel's most sacred treasure.

### **Ark of the Covenant**

The Ark was a gold rectangular box with two angels facing each other on the lid. Inside it were three significant things: the 10 commandments Moses received from God, a jar of manna (the bread God miraculously provided for them during the wilderness wanderings), and Aaron's staff (the symbol of the high priest's authority). According to God's law only the priests from the tribe of Levi could carry the Ark.

As you can see, the Ark was more than just a big, gold covered box. It represented the very person and promises of God. It was a literal and symbolic reminder to the people

of Israel they must not set out to cross the Jordan, or to invade, and possess the land in their own strength. Their only hope was to rely on God's strength. With the Ark ahead of them, they could be confident that God Himself who was going before them as their source of victory.

*The third thing I want to point out, in verse 5, is that Joshua commands the people to consecrate themselves in view of the wonders God would work among them on the next day.*

The "C" word, or consecration, is not a word that most of us are familiar with. In fact, it is not exactly a word you would expect to see used the day before a major military campaign. Normally, you would expect a military leader to have said, "Sharpen your

swords and spears and polish your shields" the day before a battle. But instead, Joshua commands the people to consecrate themselves. This word points to the need for spiritual preparation. In God's eyes, spiritual preparation was the most important kind of preparation....even more important than sharpening swords or polishing shields.

**The word "consecrate" is the Hebrew, qadash, and it means, "to make pure, clean or holy" or "to set apart, prepare, dedicate."**

To better grasp the meaning of this word, I happen to have a personal illustration that might help.

At Thomason house, we have something we call the "special" plate.

**The "special" plate**

A long time ago, we got this idea of having a unique looking plate that would only come out on birthdays or special occasion.

Typically, we use this plate as way to uniquely celebrate each person's birthday in our family. The way it works is that Norma lets the birthday person pick their favorite meal for that day and then that person gets to eat off of the special plate.

In the Thomason family, the blue plate is a special plate... a consecrated plate. It's consecrated because it's set apart from all the other plates in our kitchen cabinets. There is no other plate like it, either in color or function. It's set apart and dedicated to be used only on special occasions. In fact, it would be "wrong" in the Thomason house to use the special plate any other time of the

year! I think you get the idea.

So, the idea behind consecration in a biblical sense is that, people or things are set apart for the service of God, and that these things are then forbidden to be used for profane or common purposes. For example, in the Old Testament, the priests were to consecrate themselves before they could exercise their duties. That usually meant they would have to perform ceremonial washings or purification rites before they offered sacrifices and such.

In addition to the priests, the furniture inside the Tent (Tabernacle) of God was to be consecrated with the ceremonial anointing with oil.

The oil itself was consecrated, mixed with specific ingredients, and to be used only in anointing the Tent furniture and tools. So all through the Old Testament, we see this idea of consecration, where people or things are purified and set apart for special use by God.

The reason I'm telling us all of this is that it wouldn't have been a surprise to the Israelites that Joshua was commanding them to "consecrate themselves." They were used to this idea and they understood its meaning. The Israelites knew that they were to purify themselves and set themselves apart for their journey into the holy land.

Consecration, for them, most likely involved fasting and abstinence from sexual relationships and it most certainly involved

asking the Lord to search their hearts for any sin. The bottom line was this: If God was going to go before them and lead them, they had to be holy, set apart and consecrated for his use.

### **General Observations**

To sum up, I want to make two observations about the experience of the Israelites as they waited beside the Jordan River. Here's what I think we can learn as we prepare for major changes in our lives or in the life of our church:

**God Always Leads the Way – We Must Follow.**

Before they took one step toward the Promised Land, Israel needed to look for God. They needed to keep Him before them



so they would know where to go. If we are going to walk a way that God has never had us walk before, we need to know that we are following God. We need to wait on him to lead the way.

**Consecration Precedes Any Demonstration of God's Power.** Since God was about to lead them in a way that they had never gone before, He wanted them to be consecrated...make clean and set apart. If God will go with us, we must be holy and consecrated as well. In Leviticus 20:7,8 – God says, “So set yourselves apart to be holy, for I am the Lord your God. Keep all my decrees by putting them into practice, for I am the Lord who makes you holy.” If we expect God to go with us, then we've got to be what God expects us to be. Holiness

doesn't just happen. We must be intentional about it. We're set apart when we get saved, but we are to continue pursue holiness if we expect to see the wonders of God.

Bottom line: The urgency of crossing the Jordan and moving into the Promised Land did not rise above the necessity of preparing hearts. Sometimes we can be all about action, when in reality we have neglected our first priority...making sure our hearts are right before God. Maybe some of us today are in need of consecration. Maybe we are hanging on to some sins and are unwilling to give them up. Or maybe we need to be more set apart and dedicated to God. We all need to heed the message of Joshua, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.'" Let's pray.

## Communion

One of the ways we can personally apply this idea of "consecration" is through the taking of communion. Whenever we take communion, we acknowledge that we are in need of consecration; that we need to be cleansed, purified, dedicated and set apart for God.

As the ushers pass around the bread, take some time to reflect on what it means for you personally to be cleansed and purified. Are there sins you need to confess? Are there things you need to repent of? John said, "If we confess our sins, he (Jesus) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Whenever you are ready, eat the bread and thank Jesus for

the forgiveness and cleansing he offers you through his death on the Cross.

As the ushers pass around the cup, take some time to reflect on what it means for you personally to be dedicated and set apart. Are you available for God to use? Are you willing to let him use you however he wants to? The Apostle Peter said, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Whenever you are ready, drink the bread and ask Jesus to make you ready and willing to be set apart for Him.

**The “C” Word  
Message, Part 2, Shannon**

**10 Year Anniversary**

So as we conclude this morning’s message I wondered...how many of you knew that 10 years ago on this very Sunday morning, Rick announced to the congregation (which was gathered for service at Park Hill South that morning) that we had officially become the new owners of the former Prairie Hills Hospital.

As many of you know, for nearly 9 years NHCC had been a mobile church. This meant that every week, volunteers would haul equipment in a trailer and numerous vehicles, using Rubbermaid tubs. They hauled all this stuff in and out of clubhouses, New Mark Middle School, Park Hill South and the many locations where we held mid-week small groups and services.

In the summer of 2002, an option of purchasing the former Prairie Hills Hospital was laid on the table and thus began a season of prayer, fasting and yep that C word...consecration.

Ten years ago on this very day, there was great rejoicing among our congregation. God had given us the land he promised. I still remember that morning, following the service, car after car after car made a caravan from Park Hill South to here...our “new” home. We gathered in the then half court gymnasium to pray together.

**(Photo of gathering to pray)**

Person after person came into this place with a tremendous amount of thanksgiving in their heart, we gathered together and held hands and prayed that God would use this

place and us to gather people to Himself.

We consecrated this building and ourselves to be used by God and for God's glory. We wanted to be a city on a hill.

Just real quick. If you were here that day 10 years ago, making the trip up and standing together in that dingy gymnasium long before any remodeling began, would you raise your hand. If you want to hear some great stories of the longing and pursuit of God for a place to call home for our congregation, see one of these folks.

As for me, I remember distinctly the season prior to the purchase of this building as being one of the most transformative times in my life.

I had never really understood as clearly as I did then the concept of consecration.

Like Ladell mentioned earlier consecrate means to make pure, clean and holy or to set apart, prepare, dedicate.

I still remember walking these halls in those early days. The place had been abandoned, for lack of a better word, for well over a year. When the building shut down, people just got up and walked out leaving behind personal effects and all manner of stuff that needed cleaning and organizing.

### **(Photos of early days cleaning etc.)**

We spent so many days and nights up here cleaning. We cleaned desks, cabinets, and toilets. We wiped down walls and windows. We spiritually cleansed this place by walking through and writing scriptures on walls. If you could pull back the paint you would see scriptures written everywhere. We consecrated this place. We purified and

cleaned it physically and spiritually and then we set it apart for God's purposes. We prepared it and dedicated it for His glory.

It was a powerful time. We truly experienced God going before us and moving in us and through us.

But, before we got to the place of consecrating this building. We had been in a process of consecrating ourselves, much like Ladell mentioned the children of Israel doing.

The month prior to the purchase of the building, Rick began a series called Experiencing the Life of God. He told us the tale of two boxes. The first being our box, our life if you will. In our box, we have all the things that matter to us. We fill it with things we hope will make us happy...money, relationships, things, etc. At some point, we

may reach a point where the box leaves us wanting and we seek for something more.

If we find God, we invite Jesus into our box. For just about all of us, our hope is that Jesus will get in our box and make our box/life better. We hope He will bring peace, healing, joy and happiness and often he does for a time. But after a while life happens as it always does and when having Jesus in the box doesn't "fix" things we can get jaded, confused and disoriented.

We often miss that God has a different plan. A plan where we get into His box, His life. He wants us to get a grander vision for life. A vision where we seek Him out and we find out what matters to Him. He longs for us to take seriously the scripture:

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your**

## **mind. Matthew 22:37 (NIV)**

And so to love God with all our heart means that we begin to shift our focus from our box, our life, our wants, to focus our deepest desires and highest affections on things that matter to God.

Things like becoming a person of excellent moral character, bringing glory to His name, fully experiencing community with Him and other believers, serving “the least” of this world in Jesus’ name, being a part of redeeming the world, being a more useful member of God’s most prized possession—the church.

But how do you get to that point? How do you move from a place where you are focused on your life, your wants, your needs, your insecurities, a place where you are at the center to a place where God is at the

center?

It starts with that C word...consecrate.

We will need to make space and time to cleanse our heart. As Ladell mentioned earlier Jesus offers to do that for us.

We say it around here a lot because we never want to forget and want to be clear that we are sinners. On our own we will never be good enough to measure up to God who is holy and perfect which is why Jesus came and lived the life we were supposed to live and died the death we were supposed to die. Through Him, we can be made clean but it’s about so much more than just getting fire insurance. It’s about accepting the invitation to live the life God is inviting us to now not just in eternity. So to that end, we are invited to be active participants in the process of being made

holy.

We make time to find a place to get quiet and we search our hearts. We ask ourselves with ruthless honesty what might be standing in our way of giving our whole heart to God of loving Him with all that we are.

We ask ourselves questions like the following:

### **Do I have idols that are taking the place that belongs only to God?**

Some common idols are the approval of others, money, possessions, family, children, spouse, work, etc. Who or what is crowding out the space in my heart for God.

### **Am I struggling with being half hearted wanting to serve and give and love God but only if I can have my way too?**

This is that attitude of our heart that says

God I'll give you whatever time, talent and treasure I have left over after I do what I want to do. We stop and ask ourselves...am I giving God my best gifts or the sloppy leftovers?

### **Is there sin that I am not turning away from?**

So often we have places in our lives where the sin has taken root. Maybe we aren't willing to let it go because it feels comfortable or because it just seems too hard to give up. Gossip, envy, lust, jealousy, gluttony, greed, is there a pattern I am struggling with?

Lastly we ask the question

### **Have I become duty-oriented towards God, coasting on auto-pilot?**

We can fall into the trap of checking off the list of religious duties that will leave us

feeling either judgmental or entitled. We do for God so we feel better about ourselves or so that He will have to give us what we want because we have worked so hard for Him. It's not longer about relationship and what's been done for us but about what we have done. Are there places where I'm just coasting?

I want to challenge each of you today. Make time in the next two weeks to ask the questions I just mentioned. Call a time out on life and really examine your heart.

**Let's put those questions up one more time in case someone didn't get them all.**

Then after we have examined our hearts and asked God to cleanse them. Once our hearts are clean and pure, we can open ourselves up to be set apart for God's purpose. Only then, will we be more clear on

hearing how God wants to use us. How we can experience His life and be used to bring glory to His name.

We can more fully consider and hear what God might be saying to us in regards to the 3 questions Rick has laid before us as a congregation.

**Remember those.**

- \* What will I give in 2013?
- \* Where should I serve from January through June?
- \* Who can I invite at some point during Grand Opening Season?

10 years ago, our congregation considered a similar set of questions. As a church we committed to consecrating ourselves as we awaited the "promised" land. To do that, all those who called NHCC home were challenged and encouraged to consecrate



themselves. To set time aside to fast, to pray, to search our own hearts. We made time to look at our hearts and really prepare them for God and to be used by Him.

I believe that those of us who did just that experienced a tremendous amount of joy. We had experienced what it was like to submit to God, to be willing to put “our” stuff aside for the sake of His. And to that end, we saw and experienced His power at work in this place and in powerful ways.

Friends as we prepare for this unprecedented season in our church, listen to the words of Joshua. Accept the challenge.

**Then Joshua said to the people,  
“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the  
LORD will do wonders among you.”**

Let’s pray.

Stand and sing together making this our declaration that we have chosen today to follow the Lord. To prepare our hearts and to be purified and set apart for His purposes.