

In his classic, best-selling book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins observes, "Few people attain great lives because it's so easy to settle for good lives." For Collins, greatness is defined as financial performance several multiples better than the market average over a sustained period. God defines greatness not by what you have done compared to what others have done but by what you have done compared to what God created you to do. We can fall short of doing great things because we settle for doing good things.

But should we even want to be great? In Lk. 22 we read about one of those painfully honest moments in the life of Jesus' disciples. They gather for the last supper and v. 24 reads, "A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." Awkward! But here is the amazing thing - Jesus does not rebuke them for their DESIRE to be great. He simply defines the nature of true greatness. Greatness is serving others with the gifts we have been given.

It is a noble desire to want to be great in God's Kingdom. But most of us carry around the idea that we should not seek greatness so we settle for goodness. I want you to fulfill the highest and best purposes God has for your life. That's what we are about as a church. So today, I want to appeal to those who want to be great. If you want to live an average Christian life - go ahead. You'll go to Heaven. You are saved by grace not by works. But if you want to make an eternal impact with your one brief life and be used powerfully by God, pay attention to Joshua 3 and 4.

The people of Israel are camped by the shore of the Jordan River. This is a hinge moment in the life of Israel. They can follow Joshua across the river and take possession of the greatness of their inheritance or they can settle for a good life east of the Jordan.

For many hymn writers, the Promised Land represents heaven. Samuel Stennet wrote the hymn, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks."

*On Jordan's stormy banks I stand, And cast a wishful eye  
To Canaan's fair and happy land, Where my possessions lie.  
No chilling winds nor poisonous breath, Can reach that healthful shore;  
Sickness, sorrow, pain and death, Are felt and feared no more.*

The Promised Land does not represent Heaven. Commentators usually equate the Promised Land with our spiritual inheritance. Just as God promised the land to Abraham and his descendants as an inheritance so those who are in Christ have a spiritual inheritance God has prepared for us. That's a better analogy but it still falls

short. The Promised Land was to be a strategic base of operations from which Abraham's descendants would bless the whole world. The knowledge of the one true God would go out from there and draw all people to the "Lord of all the earth." So if the Jordan River is symbolic of the Christian life at all, it represents the demarcation between wandering in the wilderness and living life on purpose for God, between living out your God-given purpose and wandering through life in search of something more.

The transition from wilderness living to purposeful living involves three symbolic acts that are often missing in our Christian experience today. Our progress toward the preferred future God has for us is marked by these three practices.

**1. Consecration: Prepare for God's mission...**v. 1. They camped next to the river for three days, enough time to focus on the immensity of the problem they were facing. We are told in v. 15 that the river overflows its banks this time of year so it was probably a mile wide and moving swiftly. They had to confront the improbability of the situation while at the same time trusting that the God who had brought them this far would get them across the river.

Great men and women are able to hold these two realities in tension. This is called "The Stockdale Paradox." Admiral James Stockdale was held as a POW for eight years in Viet Nam. Stockdale emerged from that experience with a stunning observation. Those POW's who were overly optimistic about their chances rarely made it out alive. They would tell themselves, "I'll be home by Christmas or New Year's or summer." They overlooked the reality of their present circumstances. But those who could simultaneously maintain unwavering faith that they would prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, AND at the same time, had the discipline to confront the most brutal facts about their present reality, had a better chance of getting out alive. Consecration embraces God's greatness and human weakness.

In v. 5, Joshua commands the people, "Consecrate yourselves." We don't use this word much in casual conversation but to consecrate yourself means simply to dedicate or devote yourself exclusively for the Lord's use. The apostle Paul said it this way, "I appeal to you therefore brothers, by the mercy of God..." Ro. 12:1.

The journey from here to there is almost always preceded by a significant spiritual moment. Great men and women are fully devoted to their mission. Fully aware of the obstacles, they remain fully committed to the task no matter the cost.

MLK is a great example of this. I will never forget his final speech. His words had an eerie foreshadowing of what was to come. "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!" The next day, April 4, 1968, MLK was gunned down on the balcony of a Memphis, Tennessee, hotel. He was 39 years old.

**2. Concentration: Act upon God's miraculous intervention...3:2-4.** The only way across the river was to surrender to God's plan no matter how crazy his methods may have seemed. They had to keep their eyes on the ark.

"The ark was a portable shrine built as a rectangular box, 27 inches wide by 27 inches high by forty-five inches long. It was overlaid with gold. The cover of the ark had a golden cherub on each end facing toward the middle. It was between these two cherubs that God met with Israel." (Holman Commentary, p. 45). Inside the ark were the stone tablets upon which God recorded the 10 commandments. The presence of the ark dominates these two chapters. Ex. 25 gave instructions for people to make a sanctuary where God may live. God is not enshrined by the ark. But these places like the temple, the tabernacle, the ark, were symbolic of God's presence and power, and purpose. The lid of the ark was called the mercy seat, the place where the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled by the priest to atone for the sins of the people. So the ark was a symbol not only of God's presence but of His justice and mercy. To look to the ark was to look to God. The ark was a foreshadowing of Christ.

Then God did something miraculous...again. **vv. 7-13.** Such a beautiful picture of what it means to "walk by faith." Unless we are willing to get our feet wet we will never make much progress in our lives. The emphasis of this whole episode is that the preparation for entering the PL was spiritual not physical. They didn't have to fight with flesh and blood to get across to the other side. But they did have to confront their doubts and fears and move forward by faith keeping their eyes on the visible symbol of the "Lord of all the earth."

Let me address the subject of miracles briefly.

1. Once you get past Gen. 1:1 the rest is easy.
2. If miracles did not happen then how can we trust anything the Bible says? If the parting of the Red Sea was not literal then how do we know the rest of the story happened? Did the Hebrew people really escape Egypt? Wander in the wilderness for 40 years? Enter the Promised Land?
3. Miracles of this magnitude are rare. This was a unique period in history when God demonstrated His superior power over all other gods. Listen to Rahab's testimony...2:9-11.
4. If the God you worship is incapable of suspending the laws He created, then He is not God. The miracles prove that God has complete control over creation. Only a God of miracles is worthy of worship.
5. Seeing the miraculous does not always lead to faith. The same Israelites who saw the parting of the Red Sea did not believe that God could get them safely into the Promised Land.

If it's hard to accept these stories not because we can't understand them but because our hearts are opposed to them. It means God is in control and not my rational mind. It is God's sovereign purpose that carries me across and not my own human effort. Once you surrender your life to God, move forward by faith keeping your eyes on Jesus.

**3. Commemoration: Remember what God has done for the sake of future generations...4:1-7.** Next week we will talk about the importance of remembering God's gracious activity in our lives. But this week, in our Life Groups we are going to participate in an exercise that will help you commemorate those hinge moments in your life when God did something to change your trajectory. It looks like this...Lifelines...Hurts (below the line) and High Points (above the line). Once you complete the exercise, share it with your family members.

Crossing the Jordan is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised. This should mean the end of a life lived by human effort and the beginning of a life of faith and obedience. Let's consecrate ourselves today and commit to calling one another to live out our God-given purpose in Christ every

day. Are you prepared to pursue God's mission for your life? What do you need to do today to "get your feet wet" as a demonstration of your faith? What markers will you leave for future generations?

Father, you are "Lord of all the earth." You know our coming in and our going out. We confess that we often rush ahead when you say, "Wait" and we settle in when you say, "Move out." We remember the things we ought to forget and forget the things we ought to remember. So, we consecrate ourselves to you today. Make us a great church, full of great people, doing great things, for a great God. In your great name we pray.