

Overcoming Impossible Obstacles

Joshua 3-4

In 2014, Navy Admiral William McRaven gave the commencement speech at his alma mater the University of Texas. His advice to those graduating Longhorns was this: If you want to change the world, start out by making your bed. This is a 36-year career Navy SEAL and he chooses that piece of advice when addressing graduates. They do 10-mile runs with 50 pound packs! They do midnight swims in the freezing Pacific Ocean. They have tactical skills and they have survival skills and he wants to talk about making your bed.

Here is what he said, 'Every morning in basic SEAL training, who at the time were all Viet Nam Veterans, would show up in my barracks and the first thing they would inspect was my bed. If I did it right, the corners would be square, the covers pulled tight and the pillow centered just under the headboard and the extra blanket folded neatly at the foot of the rack. It was a simple task, mundane at best, but every morning we were required to make our bed to perfection. It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, particularly in light of the fact that we were aspiring to be real warriors, tough, battle-hardened SEALs. But that simple act has been proven to me over and over, if you make your bed, you will have accomplished the first task of the day.' Then he said this, 'If you can't do little things right, you will never do big things right.' Make the bed. The Bible offers something similar, everyday, Make an altar. Every morning, every evening, hit your knees. Submit yourself to God's Word and to God's Spirit. Give Him the first word and the last word. Give Him the first thought and the last thought of the day.

Altars in the Bible were significant places. Altars are a place where we meet with God. People through the Bible would build an altar and kneel there and offer themselves to God. Most altars in that day were built out of dirt or stone or wood. Every time someone built an altar and knelt before God they are surrendering to his sovereign control to see what He would do. In this way. Altars are like photos that are time-stamped and dated. Altars life remind us of a time, date, place where God intervened. We can go back and look at it and reflect on it. It is a profound moment. An altar is not like a casual place. It was a very serious thing.

The altar is where God makes alterations in our lives. Altars are always places where God reveals Himself in new ways. They marked moments of transitions, personal test and triumphs. When the characters in the Bible built an altar is a way of saying, "The God who got me here will get me to there." The God who did this will also do that."

In Exodus 30:1 God tells Moses, "*Make an altar.*" It was referencing the altar of incense, and priests were to burn incense there every morning and every evening. God was saying to Moses and to us if you want to get closer to Me, one way to do that is to build an altar. It was a place where you seek God.

Altars were built in different seasons of their life:

- Altars were built for future generations – Our kids need to see.
- Altars were built to take territory for a deity – Our altars make spiritual conquest.
- Altars were built in significant moments - So we don't forget.
- Altars were built to sacrifice something on – Wherever there's an altar, there's sacrifice.

Altars were always built at the moments of new beginnings. Every new season needs an altar. A new job, a new relationship or the end of a relationship. When you are coming out of a season of failure or of disappointment you are ready to turn to a new chapter and make a fresh start. An altar in a recognition that God is with you in those moments.

The dominant story of the Old Testament is the story of these slaves in bondage who God reaches down and lifts out of Egypt. He lifts them out of darkness, out of bondage, out of slavery, into a new life.

It's the Exodus – it's our story. It's the story of leaving the past behind and moving into a new quality of life. That's redemptions story. It's the story of what happens when God is at work in your life. When you are rescued, redeemed, and released from whatever holds you down, holds you back, and ensnares you. To get somewhere new the first thing you have to do is leave where you are. They are about to enter a new land, to live a new life with all kinds of new possibilities.

The land was theirs, but they would have to fight for it. We want God to give us the land (victory, a good marriage, a business) you will have to fight for it. When they were willing to fight for it, God began to fight for them.

They had to leave Egypt before they could come to the new land. They had to come through the wilderness to get to the new land. To move forward we have to be willing to abandon ourselves to the new life. To move on we have to be willing to leave some things behind.

It is possible to go around in circles and keep experiencing the same things over and over again. Going around in circles, dying. Possible to be caught up in things that eventually kill you. The Enemy wants you far away the promised land.

They are at a critical point, they have been here before. But they would not face their giants and so they wandered in the desert and experienced 40 years of struggle and disappointment because of it. But now they are at the promised land.

Their refusal to face their giants cost them the entering in and meant 40 years of heartaches and headaches.

“Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 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. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.” Joshua 3:1-3

This is where you either breakdown or you breakthrough. This is where you decide if the dream is worth it. It's one thing to dream it's another thing to take possession of that dream. God is the source of the good life that you long for. To move into God's blessing and favor you will have to leave somethings behind. Here they would either go over or go under.

- Cross over into the promise.
- Settle down on this side of Jordan and give up.

Jordan is a place of impossibility, it is a place of weakness, helplessness, It is the place where all self effort dies, it is where we come face to face with ourselves. It represents they places you can't cross alone. You may face your Jordan during a time of sickness, or a time of great financial difficulty, or a time of family turmoil.

Jordan is a dividing line, it's the place where we are forced to decide are we going to trust in the living God? or are we going to trust in the arm of the flesh and self efforts?

Some of us may have an uncrossable river in our life. Looming just before you there is a river that seems impossible to deal with.

What does it take to get across Jordan?

As chapter 3 begins the children of Israel are on the banks of the river Jordan. Behind them is the land of the wilderness where they have wandered for forty years. On the other side of the river Jordan is the land of Canaan, the land God has promised unto them. God is getting ready to perform one of the great miracles He performed in the life of the children of Israel. The crossing of the Jordan is one of the major events in all of the Bible.

The five geographical locations of Egypt, the Red Sea, the Wilderness, Jordan and Canaan are very important in the history of the children of Israel. When we read these things in the Old Testament we are not just reading some old ancient history. What God did for the children of Israel in the Old Testament teaches us what God can do in our lives. What we're reading about today that happened thousands of years ago has a lot to say about your Christian life.

There are Some Christians are winners and some are losing. There are Some Christians who are conquering and others who are being conquered. There are Some Christians who are overcoming in their Christian life and there are other Christians who are being overcome.

Possible to give your heart to Jesus and still live outside of the life that God has made possible for us. Possible to be free from Egypt and yet not enjoy the kind of life God plans for you. To live on the wrong side of the Jordan. God has so much for us but we will have to fight for it.

We are going to see the spiritual significance of crossing over Jordan.

1. **The Moment of Dedication**

"And Joshua rose early in the morning." Joshua 1:1

The secret to Joshua's success is in Exodus 33:11 *"Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Afterward, Moses would return to the camp, but the young man who assisted him, Joshua son of Nun, would remain behind in the Tent of Meeting."*

Why did Joshua become the leader of Israel after Moses? Because he didn't leave the Tent of Meeting. Because those who God uses the most spend the most time in God's presence because those are the people who know God best and that is who God can trust the most.

When I was younger I used to think the people who went to the altar were the people with the most problems. But what I discovered was it is the people who have the most courage. It is the people who are actually hungry for God and who knew how much they needed God. I know that I need more of God today than I did yesterday. And I will need Him more tomorrow than I did today. So I decided if the altar is open, I'm going to go.

Joshua was an early riser. In Joshua 6 it says, *"and Joshua rose early in the morning."* Joshua 6:12

In the 7th chapter, *"So Joshua rose up early in the morning."* Joshua 7:16

In the 8th chapter, *"And Joshua rose up early in the morning."* Joshua 8:10

Joshua liked to get up early. He read and prayed. He needed spiritual worship. Joshua had a quiet time in the early morning and began his day with God. Every Christian ought to begin his/her day with God. You ought to seek the face of God before you see the face of people. You ought to get alone with God before you go out among people. When you get alone with God, get in His Word and pray at the beginning of the day, then you set the course for the day.

When we set our relationship with God first then we are able to deal in our relationships with other people.

They come to Jordan and they lodge there. Verse 2 tells us that they stayed there for three days. Joshua knew his problems were spiritual problems and needed a spiritual solution. So he gets up early in the morning to gain some insight and spiritual help with his problems

Many times in the Bible the number is repeated. Nehemiah, as he was getting ready to rebuild the walls, when he got back to Jerusalem spent three days looking over the situation. Our Savior, the Lord Jesus was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. On that third day He rose again.

Three days is a reminder we have to learn to wait on the Lord. We have to learn to get alone with God, to spend time alone with God as we anticipate what he's going to do in our lives.

“Joshua told the people, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you. 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.” Joshua 1:5-6

“Sanctify” means “separation” they had picked up some habits, hang-ups and hurts in Egypt and the desert they needed to leave behind. There were things they needed to lay down and there were things they needed to pick up.

Truett Cathy loved cars and he loved giving cars. He was disciplining a young man, the young man needed a car but needed disciplining even more so he struck a deal. He said to the young man, ‘I’ve got some tapes of Dr. Charles Stanley, I want you to listen to these tapes and we are going to talk about them and see what God does.’ But he played a little trick on the young man. On the last tape, he recorded over Charles Stanley and recorded a message to this young man that said hey, the keys to your new car are in my office. The kid never listened to the tapes. Truett Cathy kept reminding him to listen to them, day after day, week after week. About a month and he realized it wasn’t going to happen. He called the young man into his office and played the last tape for him but he didn’t give him the car. He said it might have been one of the toughest lessons this kid ever learned and one of the toughest lessons he ever taught. Here’s what he said, to receive a blessing, we often have to take action first.

- Dedication involves a breaking.

Joshua says to the people, *“Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”* Joshua 3:5

He is saying that tomorrow God is going to do a miracle, but you have get ready to receive it. We believe that God is a God of miracles. God is still doing miracles.

A miracle is God doing what He chooses to do with His own creation. God is independent of His creation. Sometimes you hear people talking about the law of nature. Truthfully there isn't any such thing as the laws of nature. There are the laws of God that operate in nature. All of the laws of nature are the laws of God. God is the creator and He is not confined by the laws of His own creation. God can do anything He wants to do with His creation anytime He wants to do it.

God is going to do a miracle. God says to the children of Israel through Joshua, *“Sanctify yourselves.”* Set yourself apart. Be close to God. Be dedicated to God. He is going to perform a miracle.

Every breakthrough requires a breaking on our part. It means that I give more areas of my life to Him. It’s why two people go the altar and some remain the same and others seem to be different. There is something that breaks in you before you break-through. But you have to want it.

You can experience a breakthrough anytime you want it, but you have to want it. We have to first decide where we need a breakthrough.

- Dedication involves following.

“Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them.”
Joshua 3:6

They are impressed with the holiness of God as the Ark is separated a distance from them. This is a box made out of wood. It was overlaid with gold. It had a solid gold lid on top of it. Inside that ark of the Covenant, was the law of God - the tablets of the law of God. The lid - the mercy seat - represents the love of God. The Ark of the Covenant is a picture of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was perfect humanity. That's what the wood represents. But Jesus Christ was also perfect deity. That's what the gold represents. So you have in Jesus Christ a combination. He was man and yet He was God.

He was God and yet He was man. He was the God-man. In the Lord Jesus Christ we have the perfect combination of the law and the love of God. So, when you see this The Ark of the Covenant leading the Children of Israel toward the river Jordan is a picture of our Savior the Lord Jesus leading us.

The Ark of the Covenant was to go down into the Jordan and then the Ark of the Covenant was to come up out of Jordan. Jesus Christ went down into the river Jordan to be baptized of John, this is exactly where Jesus was baptized. When Jesus was baptized He went into the water - predicting and picturing His death and burial.

He came up out of the water picturing His resurrection and His ascension. The whole Jordan experience points us to the Lord Jesus Himself who died and was buried for our sins and who arose and ascended back to heaven to give us victory over sin. Following Jesus is how you get victory over all your Jordans. You get victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ who gives us the victory over the rivers of Jordan and the difficulties that we face in life.

2. The Miracle of The Crossing

"For Jordan overflows all its banks at the time of harvest." Joshua 3:15

There is a very practical message in this. We all face the flooded rivers of difficulty. Some of us could use some help with the uncrossable rivers in our lives. Some may be facing a river of doubt. Others of you may be facing a river of sickness. Some of you may be facing a river of fear. You can't seem to get over it. You can't quite cross over and get victory over this uncrossable river in your life. It represents the places you can't cross alone. To cross here and to cross now would take a bold crossing. So Jordan is a dividing line, it's the place where we are forced to make a decision. Are we going to trust in the living God, or are we going to trust in the arm of self effort? Some of us have uncrossable rivers in our lives. We need to experience a BOLD CROSSING.

Normally, the rivers of Jordan are about 100 feet wide. But in flood times they spread to a distance of a mile. When God gets ready to do a miracle He wants to show you that it's a real big one. God is going to really do something here that's impossible.

I can almost imagine those children of Israel looking up and they saw a mile of water - that river of Jordan. There are some of you sitting here and you are facing a Jordan that looks like an impossibility in your life. There are some of you. They were standing on the brink of a river and it seems to be an uncrossable river for them. You don't know how you are going to go over. You don't know how you are going to get through.

“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." Joshua 3:14-16

They were crossing Jordan. God parts the Jordan River just as He did the Red Sea. That's why we build altars. Because altars remind us that the God who did it before can do it again. The God who did this can do that. The God who got us here and get us there! Our God is the the God who works before us. The God who works all things together for good. The God who orders our footsteps. The God who prepares good works in advance. The God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

They came right up to the edge of the river Jordan and God said, "*walk on into the river.*" Walk right into that impossible situation because the Lord is with you. You can walk into your impossible situation because "*The Lord is with you.*"

In Joshua chapter 1 God promised, "*Every place that the soul of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given you.*" Joshua 1:3

It was just a matter of where they were willing to put their feet. It's just a matter of where they were willing to step. They had in front of them an uncrossable river. An impossible task. Some of you have an impossibility in front of you. For some, it may be a river of habit. There may be a habit that is defeating you as a Christian. You just can't seem to get victory over it. Maybe it's an alcohol habit or a drug problem or you struggle with pornography. But it's an uncrossable Jordan. For some of you it may be a personality trait that has dogged you all your life.

You came to the Lord, asked God to forgive you of your sins. But you realize that there is still some personality traits there in your life and they are not pleasing to you. Maybe it's a hateful disposition. You just can't seem to conquer it. Maybe it's a gossiping tongue. You haven't been able to deal with it after coming into the faith.

You heard about the sister who was famous for her gossiping in the church. She came to the pastor all broken up. She said, "I want to lay my tongue on the altar for the Lord." He said, "Sister, our altar is only 14 feet wide, but we'll do the best we can."

Maybe it's a personality trait. Maybe it's a negative spirit. Maybe it's a tendency to be unkind. You have wrestled with it and it's like an uncrossable river in your life. Others have problems at home. It's just an impossibility. We have a God who specializes in the impossible.

Construction battalions. The CB's were so significant in WWII. They would go ahead of the advancing army and build bridges and roads and landing strips. The CB's had a very interesting motto. They said, "The difficult we do right now, the impossible will take a while longer." We have a God of the impossible. We have a God who can part the waters of the impossible, uncrossable rivers of our lives.

Between Israel and the impossibility of the Jordan there was an Ark that represented our Savior who can do all things. There is nothing beyond the power of our Savior. They put their feet in the water and the moment they did the waters began to pass and they went over on dry ground. By faith we claim the victory which is ours in the death and burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has already gone ahead for us. Jesus has already paved the way for us. You don't need a bridge over troubled waters. You have a road that leads you through the waters and Jesus has paved the road that leads through the troubled waters for you and me

The Red Sea represents salvation. The river Jordan represents sanctification. The river Jordan reminds us of a new level of Christian living. You don't have to live in the wilderness. You don't have to be overcome as a Christian. You don't have to be defeated as a Christian. There is a Canaan land out there for you. On the basis of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ you have victory in the Lord himself.

3. The Memorial to God's Faithfulness

It was the Israelites first night in the Promised Land. They had dreamed of this for 430 years.

"When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." Joshua 4:1-3

God established some memorials. Memorials are very important. When you work down through this chapter you will find that God has them to set up two different sets of 12 stones.

"And Joshua set up 12 stones in the middle of Jordan in the place where the feet of the priests that bare the Ark of the Covenant stood." Joshua 4:9

Compare that with verse 3. *"put them down at the place where you stay tonight (Over on the bank of Jordan.)"* Joshua 3:3

What you have in chapter 4 are two sets of stone. One set of stones was to be set up in the riverbed. Right where you are living, you need to know God delivered you. The other set of stones was to be set up on the promise land side on the river bank.

One set of stones was in the middle of the Jordan River and when the waters came rushing back in it was invisible. The other set of stones was on the bank and it was visible. An invisible memorial and a visible memorial.

What's the point of this? Why did God say set up some stones in the middle of the Jordan when it would be hidden? The stones down in the middle of the riverbed could only be seen by the eyes of God. When Jesus went to the cross of Calvary, there is very little written actually describing the crucifixion of Jesus. We are left only to our imaginations really to know the things that really happened. Do you know why? When our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ died on that cross for your sins and my sins it was so awful and He was so holy that only the eyes of God could look upon it. In fact, it got so bad that God just turned His Son off. The hymn writer puts it quite well: "Well might the sun in darkness hide and shut His glories in. When God the mighty Maker died for man, the creatures sin." None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed. Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through ere He found His sheep that was lost.

But God looks to the cross, to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and it is on the basis of the death of Jesus that we leave the wilderness land of defeat and we walk into the victory land of Canaan. One memorial was invisible – it reminds us of the death of Jesus. There's another memorial on the bank and One memorial was visible it reminds us of the resurrection (the victory) of Jesus.

You and I claim the death and the resurrection of Jesus as the basis of our victory. The stones in the bed of the river remind me that I died with Christ. The stones on the bank of the river remind me I am risen with Christ. There came a time when I received Jesus Christ as my Savior and I became a dead man -- dead to sin.

That's why it's so important for people to be baptized. When people are baptized in the water they are giving the first testimony in their Christian life. When you are baptized you are lowered into that water, picturing the death of Jesus and your death to sin. When you come up out of that water you are picturing His resurrection and your resurrection to walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ. You have a brand new life in Jesus and you have the indwelling presence of the Living Jesus Himself to give you the power to live that life. You can't live the Christian life. It's totally impossible. You've found that out, haven't you? It's a river Jordan -- it's impossible. But the good news is that when you come to Christ you have the Living Jesus Christ Himself in

you and Jesus can live the Christian life through you as you claim crossing over Jordan in Jesus' name.

God said, "I want these memorials." There were two reasons why God wanted them to commemorate crossing Jordan.

"Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever." Joshua 4:6-7

Children are inquisitive. So, on an afternoon an Israelite would be having a picnic with his children over on the banks of Jordan. The children would see those twelve stones on the Canaan side. They would say, "Daddy, why are those stones all piled up there for?" Daddy would say, "I don't know, son, go ask your Sunday School teacher." No. You can't put it off on the Sunday School teacher. It's the father's responsibility to know. The father is the spiritual head of his family. The father takes the lead. The father answers the question.

Here's the second reason in verse 24 –

"He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God." Joshua 4:24

these memorial stones to be a testimony to your own children, but they are to be a testimony to all the peoples around you.

"And it came to pass when the priests that bare the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the souls of the priests feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place and flowed over all its banks as they did before." Joshua 3:18

Imagine how the children of Israel must have looked as they saw those waters of the Jordan come back together and realize that a miracle had occurred. In the end they found themselves on the other side of the pile of stones. The 12 stones are testimonies to the delivering power of God. A memory of what God had done. Their life changed when they got on the other side of the pile. When you don't have a breakthrough it can be a frustrating thing. They left some things in the river, and they took some things out of the river to remind them.

Their life changed when they got on the other side of the pile. Their life changed when they choose to leave some things behind. What does it take to get across Jordan? Die to some "old loves" to cross over and awaken to a new life. This is the story of people who choose to make a bold crossing.

Our needs often will take a bold crossing. A bold step. Reset their life and their mission but it would take a bold crossing. They would live free but it would take a bold crossing. Some of us have been wandering around, and it's time for a bold crossing. Some of us are carrying heavy stones from years of hurts and heartaches and it's time for a bold crossing. Some of us have be tripped up and held back by habits that hinder us and it's time for a bold crossing.

Bring your stones as a testimony of His power over your need. Leave it here. Leave that thing behind and celebrate the life he has dreamed for you. For some of us it has been a long year and along the way, we pick up our own stones of hurts, habits, or heartaches. It's time to leave them behind. It robs us of joy. Makes life weary and dreary.