

Jesus our Joshua (5)

Finding new Confidence. Joshua 3: 9-17

As soon as---their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. v 15-16

They will mock him, and spit upon him and flog him and kill him and after three days he will rise again Mk.10:34

The long journey in the desert was over; the mystery of an unknown land and life lay before the people of Israel. The Pillar of Cloud would no longer guide them (v 7). That night the Lord honoured Joshua's faith by revealing to him how they would cross the Jordan. Then he could announce it to the nation how the nation with children, wives, cattle, tents and baggage would cross. (v 9-13) This was to ensure that after the event they would know that their crossing was no coincidence.

Jesus had also detailed his death and resurrection before the event (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34) This would be another mystery beyond human comprehension, but the Apostles and the people were to be witnesses, not scientists, psychologists or important politicians.

It was Joshua who told the Priests to take up the ark, the symbol of the divine presence and to step into the overflowing waters of the Jordan. This was a solemn and extraordinary moment.

Christ is the Living Ark of the Covenant. He is more than a symbol, he is the living reality of the divine presence who goes before us and who says, '**Lo I am with you always**'; (Matt 28:20). Author, Henrietta Mears reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who whispers in our ear and says, '***This is the way, walk in it.***' (Isaiah 30:21)

Forty years before Israel had escaped into Sinai via the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14:15, Joshua 2:10) but now it was a 'big ask' to invade Canaan without the possibility of retreat from the enemy chariots and fortified cities. Joshua announced that the crossing would be arranged by "**the Lord of all the earth**" in contrast to the dead gods of the heathen. Although the people of Israel don't see their God or have an image of him as they faced this great undertaking, the people could know that this moment was no mere fluke. Israel was to be fortified and steeled **by knowing the "Living God."** The very '**Being of Life and Power**' was with them.

God demanded the people's attention because it is the hearing of the Word of God that sets the people of God apart. (Joshua 3:9) (John 17:17-19). The people are not left to their own resources, instead of following the cloud by day, they are directed to follow the ark. The promise is given to all God's people facing crisis., "***When you pass through the waters I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you***" (Isaiah 43:2) The gods of other kings had been worthless in defence of their people and the word had spread. (Joshua 2:10)

Although Christianity in the West today faces the formidable obstacle of Canaan's false gods and the flooded Jordan of a secular culture that no longer recognises a revealed or absolute truth, yet Joshua says, ***“Come here and listen to the words of our Lord your God.”*** The Lord of all the earth would show that he is the one true God. (v 9-10) (What did Jesus say about a sign? Matt. 12:38-40)

G. K. Chesterton has said, ***“When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.”*** Today the marginalisation of Christianity has created a vacuum which is being filled by the superstitious gods of Canaan, by paganism, radical Islamists and the tyranny of new age ideologies.

How would Baal compare as the Canaanites storm god, believed to bring rain and fertility? To the Canaanites the swollen Jordan River filled to overflowing appeared to them as if Baal had blessed them and was defending them. Still, they had heard of the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15) but surely no army could cross the great barrier of a swollen river. When the Lord of Heaven and earth touched the Jordan, the waters receded and in his presence God's people passed through on dry ground.

The deliverance of God's people is an instruction to all people and fair warning not to contend with Omnipotence (all powerful God). It is clear the event terrified the already frightened Canaanites (Joshua 2:11 and 5:1)

Reflection:

(1) As a matter of interest, it is said 1400 years after Joshua that Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, at the same place where Joshua and Israel crossed. (Halley's Bible Handbook) What might it mean for you and me now to think of Jesus as being our Joshua.?

(2) The early church faced extreme persecution. Nevertheless, like the Israelites, facing seemingly insurmountable odds, their testimony and suffering later resulted in the church rediscovering its identity. The historical cycle of repentance and reform offers tremendous hope and encouragement to faithful believers. Recall times of God's intervention and Christian renewal movements through history.

Discuss the statement: ***“The flickering flame of the wayward church can burst into a flaming fire to rediscover its identity and to be the shaper of morality and godly living.”***

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