

SERMON: You Have Never Traveled This Way Before**GOOD Morning OIC & Welcome to Father's House**

In my last Message in the Book of Joshua, I closed with these comments:

Our final peace and safety for our eternal life in Glory with Jesus rests completely on His perfect obedience to God as the Blood Sacrifice for our sins. We cannot add to that work, nor do our failures take away from it. He exclaimed this for us on His Cross in His Last Breath in Death in **(John 19.28 - 30)** *28 Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. 30 When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

Yes, Christians, our final peace and safety for our eternal life in Glory with Jesus rests completely on His perfect obedience to God. Yet we often struggle for peace and safety on our journey here below. Confidence in our final safety with Jesus after we depart from this Earth does shine back, like a bright sunrise, on each day's troubles. But yet, the uncertainty of tomorrow often is heavier than our facing death itself. The Lord Jesus knows this, as He became 100% human in feelings yet 100% God. God knows that ***You Have Not Come This Way Before!***

Today we look at Joshua, full of courage and boldness, as he leads God's people into the Promised Land to conquer and rule. My last message Bible Reading closed with Rahab, the prostitute in Jericho, accepting the terms for her safety from the two Israelite spies. The *Scarlet Thread* was her signpost for protection as we read in **(Joshua 2.21)** *"I accept your terms," she replied. And she sent them on their way, leaving the scarlet rope hanging from the window.* After the spies followed Rahab's wise instructions to escape from the soldiers chasing after them, they returned across the Jordan River to Joshua.

In **(Joshua 2.22-24)**: *22 The spies went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men who were chasing them searched everywhere along the road, but they finally returned without success. 23 Then the two spies came down from the hill country, crossed the Jordan River, and reported to Joshua all that had happened to them. 24 "The LORD has given us the whole land," they said, "for all the people in the land are terrified of us."*

TAKEAWAY #1

Our confidence in conflict requires courage. Knowing that our opposition fears us gives us greater confidence. This gave the Israelite spies confidence in (Joshua 2.24), *“The LORD has given us the whole land,” they said, “for all the people in the land are terrified of us.”* It is hard to *feel it*, but Jesus' arch Enemy, and ours too, the Devil fears us. Because he is a liar, don't expect him to ever admit this. The Apostle John lifts our confidence in (1 John 4.4) *But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.*

The Israelites Cross the Jordan – A New Adventure

3 *Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. 2 Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, 3 giving these instructions to the people: “When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, move out from your positions and follow them. 4 Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about half a mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don't come any closer.”*

THE ARKS OF THE BIBLE

There are two Arks in the Bible: Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant. The two Hebrew words' meanings for “ark” --- Noah's Ark is *Noah's Box*; The Ark of the Covenant is a *chest with a sense of gathering things into a box*. The use of both words for Ark are the Lord's gathering what He has chosen to be stored in each Ark; one for Life, the other for Holiness.

We read in (**Genesis 7.11-15**) *11 When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. 12 The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights. 13 That very day Noah had gone into the boat with his wife and his sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives. 14 With them in the boat were pairs of every kind of animal—domestic and wild, large and small—along with birds of every kind. 15 Two by two they came into the boat, representing every living thing that breathes.* So God had gathered for “Noah's Ark,” every living thing that breathes that He had chosen to survive the Flood into the Ark.

We see God's plans for the Ark of the Covenant in (**Exodus 25.10-22**) : **10** *“Have the people make an Ark of acacia wood—a sacred chest 120 centimeters long, 60 centimeters wide, and 60*

centimeters high. **11** Overlay it inside and outside with pure gold, and run a molding of gold all around it. **12** Cast four gold rings and attach them to its four feet, two rings on each side. **13** Make poles from acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. **14** Insert the poles into the rings at the sides of the Ark to carry it. **15** These carrying poles must stay inside the rings; never remove them. **16** When the Ark is finished, place inside it the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, [b] which I will give to you. **17** “Then make the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—from pure gold. It must be 120 centimeters long and 60 centimeters wide. **18** Then make two cherubim from hammered gold, and place them on the two ends of the atonement cover. **19** Mold the cherubim on each end of the atonement cover, making it all of one piece of gold. **20** The cherubim will face each other and look down on the atonement cover. With their wings spread above it, they will protect it. **21** Place inside the Ark the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, which I will give to you. Then put the atonement cover on top of the Ark. **22** I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant. From there I will give you my commands for the people of Israel.

In the Jewish religion there were objects that were holy in the sense that they belonged to God and must not be touched by ordinary people. (*Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, M&C). The Lord had commanded Moses and the priests that His Holy things must not be touched. For the Israel camp to travel, certain priests, including the Kohathites, were allowed to touch these. Only the Levitites could safely carry the *Ark of the Covenant* by long poles inserted in the handles. We read in (**Numbers 4.15**) *The camp will be ready to move when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the sacred articles. The Kohathites will come and carry these things to the next destination. But they must not touch the sacred objects, or they will die. So these are the things from the Tabernacle that the Kohathites must carry.* Obedience to that Command required by the Lord regarding His Holy Things is why the leaders with Joshua had instructed the people distance from the Priests. In (**Joshua 3.4**) *Stay about half a mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don’t come any closer.”*

But the *Ark of the Covenant* was, in many respects, the most important object of all. It consisted of a wooden box surmounted by two figures of cherubim. Cherubim are Angels of God. They likely were as in the photo of a Biblical copy of the *Ark* in the overhead. But the *Ark* itself was never seen after King Nebuchadnezzar invaded and looted Jerusalem about 586 B.C. The box was about 120 centimeters by 60 centimeters by 60 centimeters. It contained the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron's Rod. Manna was the miracle food the Lord created every night for the Israelites in the wilderness. Aaron's rod had sprouted new leaves to prove his accepted priesthood with God against his accusers. The *Ark* was a throne for the

invisible God who was, for the understanding of the people, seated on the wings of the cherubim and whose voice came from above the *Ark*. *God, who fills the Universe*, makes His Presence often fit what the people He loves need to have a relationship with Him as seen in **(Exodus 25.22)** *22 I will meet with you there and talk to you from above the atonement cover between the gold cherubim that hover over the Ark of the Covenant. From there I will give you my commands for the people of Israel.*

Yet in His infinite love and mercy, He chooses to meet people where they are at, if their hearts truly seek Him. God knew that even His faithful people needed a physical object to focus on in their relationship of faith in Him. This description is important for us to understand the importance and necessity of the *Ark of the Covenant* to the Israel nation as they are courageously attacking overwhelming numbers of foes in Canaan. It is important to also note that the Father of the Faith, Abraham, had only God's voice. God used the multitude of the stars in the sky to illustrate His Promise, but, no physical object. Similarly, Moses had miracles by angels, a burning bush that was not consumed, but no holy object to take with him. The Lord made his shepherd staff to be a miraculous instrument for miracles. Moses lifted this staff for miracles of deliverance of Israel from Egypt. But it was not an object to worship.

CHRISTIAN OBJECTS

As believers in Jesus, it is worth taking this example to consider holy objects for Christians.

THERE ARE NONE! Many Believers wear a Cross as jewelry. This is not only a reminder of what Jesus did for us on His Bloody Cross; but also, shows that *We are not ashamed of this Good News about Christ.* **(Romans 1.16)** The jewelry has no power in itself.

For we Christians are the “holy objects” ourselves. We are all holy priests who serve God. The Apostle Peter teaches this to the Christians in **(1 Peter 2.9)** *...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.* This “Priesthood of All Believers” has distinguished the Protestant Churches for more than 500 years. All Christians have the Holy Spirit inside and the Bible, the Word of God, to study outside! They need no human man who claims to be infallible (not able to sin or err) to direct their lives! Of course, for different callings, God gives singular gifts to serve. But, we are all Holy Priests for Jesus.

And as the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth in **(1 Corinthians 6.19-20)** *Don't you realize that your body is **the temple of the Holy Spirit**, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You*

do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

FOCUS ON THE ARK WHILE TRAVELING INTO THE PROMISED LAND

We also see that the *Ark of the Covenant* had a special purpose for traveling in **(Joshua 3.3-4)**

“When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, move out from your positions and follow them. 4 Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. This visible object of worship, the *Ark of the Covenant*, was a signpost on the highway for the people. They were moving into a country foreign and strange to them. There may have been a million Israelites at this time. Although the million who left Egypt had all died for their unbelief in the wilderness, their children likely equaled their numbers. The Israelites pressed on with courage and faith in the Lord and His appointed leader. But as they marched into the Battle for the Promised Land, they had only the *Ark* to show them the way. Thus in **(Joshua 3.4)***Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you.*

CHRISTIANS FOCUS ON JESUS TRAVELING INTO THEIR PROMISED LAND-----INTO THE GLORY OF HEAVEN

Christians have the testimonies of men and women of God to help them know more from experience about Jesus. We can sit at the feet of proven teachers to encourage us all *How To Live For Him Who Died For Us*. But no one has “finished their life” with Jesus and come back to talk about it. NO ONE! That is no one except Jesus Himself!

SO YOU HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED THIS WAY BEFORE

The Israelites' pilgrimage or religious journey would only end after the battles against their enemies in the physical *Promised Land*. God gave them their leader, Joshua, and an Holy Object to look at in the confusion of crossing the Jordan River.

Although a Christian's Promised Land might be called Heaven, we are on a journey to be with the *Promised Person, Jesus!* He is not only the Leader, but our object of Worship. In the realm of the invisible Universe, there is One Lord who has conquered all our spiritual enemies on His Cross...JESUS! Neither our Leader nor our Promised Land is visible to us yet.

THE INVISIBLE GOD FOR ALL CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

Victory for Christian soldiers always starts and ends with their relationship with the Lord Himself. Our love for Jesus is the glue for our spiritual armor. As the Apostle Peter said in **(1 Peter 1.8)** *You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.*

OUR FOCUS – OUR ARK OF THE NEW COVENANT – JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD

Reading **(Joshua 3.5)** Then *Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do great wonders among you.”* Christians live by God's undeserved favor, as in **(James 4.6)** *And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* But our walking close to Jesus is always adds to God's great wonders in our lives. We were purified by Jesus' Blood the day we were born-again. Yet we need renewed purity by spending time with Jesus in His Word and in prayer.

(Joshua 3. 6-11) *In the morning Joshua said to the priests, “Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river.” And so they started out and went ahead of the people.*

7 The LORD told Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. 8 Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: ‘When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there.’”

The Lord was about to do another great miracle, open the Jordan River with Joshua, even as He had split open the Red Sea with Moses.

9 So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the LORD your God says. 10 Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of you. 11 Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River!

The Israelites and today's Christians need to **know that the living God is among you.** Jesus Promised in **(Matthew 28.20)** *Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* That age is the Age of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' Church. It can be said either the Rapture of the Church or Jesus' Return shows that that Age has ended.

Next, Joshua promises that God will drive out all their enemies in the Promised Land. Although Jesus has promised us victories against spiritual enemies, most of our struggles are connected to

physical events of life itself. Even if we have the spiritual victory, our humanness often needs Jesus' tender loving care....so often.

SO YOU HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED THIS WAY BEFORE

God also chooses to prove, and improve, His children through trials and tests that we never saw before. Our human weakness is often more difficult than a spiritual foe. We only walk through this life once. We don't get to start life again. But, as Forgiven Sinners, everyday is a new day with Jesus regardless of the strange things before us. He has gone before us and knows the End from the Beginning.

Jesus foresaw hard times, of course, as He taught His Disciples in **(Luke 9.23)** *Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me.*

(Joshua 3.11) *Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River!*

Many Christian songs and hymns use the Jordan River as a symbol of Death. Thus "Crossing the Jordan" is sung as passing through death to go to Heaven. This is Biblically acceptable, but, I agree with C.H. Spurgeon who said: *"Death holds no terror for Christians. The painful trials we have before death are much greater than death will be."* Therefore, the Jordan Rivers before we face death need Jesus' power to lead us across.

As Jesus said in **(John 14.1-3)** *"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2 There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.* Jesus, the Saviour of the Church, will return for us someday as He promised. Jesus, our personal Saviour, will return when everything is ready! Either to bring the Church to Heaven or, through death, to bring each Believer to be with Him.

As I said earlier, I believe that the trials of life are much more painful than Death will be for any Christian. I am not talking about physical pain, but that inward pain in the soul as we keep picking up our cross to follow Jesus through times of *uncertainty!* These trials of Life always have a large amount of *uncertainty in them.* Death, our last enemy, is shown to be quite simple in the Bible. In fact we have God's promise in **(1 Corinthians 15.55)** *O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*

I believe that our Gethsemane experiences, like Jesus had, are more difficult than death to endure, and to *Continue in the Faith*, (**Acts 14.22**). These are hard decision times, as Jesus had wrestled with God's Will to the Cross. We too may have a decision when finding God in it seems impossible!

Christians who pick up their cross to follow Jesus also may experience feelings that God has forsaken them. They may feel like Jesus on His Cross when He exclaimed in (**Matthew 27.46**) *At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"* As Jesus became Sin for us, God the Father really did abandon Him for the Perfect Sacrifice for Sin. But, we only *feel* like Jesus has abandoned us. His Promise to never leave us is TRUE!

Finally, Joshua tells the people how they will make it, succeed, be victorious to go across the River. In (**Joshua 3.11**) *Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River!*

Although He is invisible, we can look to our Ark of the New Covenant of His Blood, Jesus Christ. We look and focus on Jesus as in (**Hebrews 12.2**) *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's.*

Jesus showed in His perfect obedience that He finished what He starts...all the way to the Cross. He is our *champion who initiates and perfects our faith*. He will bring us to cross the many Jordan Rivers that seem impossible to cross. If our faith is too small..He will make it *grow*, and even make it more *perfect....more like His*. God specializes in taking the uncertainties in our Lives, to bring glory to His Son Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

Let us Pray,

REFERENCES

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