

**SERMON: STEP BY STEP**

**GOOD Morning OIC & Welcome to Father's House**

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

**Each of us has our own personal *uncrossable Jordan Rivers*. We must never forget the power of prayer. Don't look at your little faith, and human weakness; but at the Faithfulness of our Lord Jesus. As Jesus' half brother James showed the human weakness of God's prophet of power, *Elijah*, in (James 5.16-17/AMP) . *The heartfelt and persistent prayer of a righteous man (believer) can accomplish much [when put into action and made effective by God—it is dynamic and can have tremendous power]. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours [with the same physical, mental, and spiritual limitations and shortcomings], and he prayed intensely for it not to rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.***

**Let us pray with intensity and persistence, and belief in God's power.**

**I chose the title of this sermon, “STEP BY STEP,” meditating on the courageous steps that Joshua and the Israeites took to follow and obey God. This reminded me of a Christian praise song from America in the 1990's:**

*O God, You are my God, I will ever praise You  
I will seek You in the morning, and learn to know Your ways,  
Step by step You will lead me  
And I will follow You all of my days*

**MEMORIALS TO OUR JORDAN CROSSINGS**

Today we shall follow Joshua and the Israelites in their first days in their Land of Promise.

Reading (Joshua 4.4-7) *4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen—one from each of the tribes of Israel. 5 He told them, “Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the LORD your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder—twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. 6 We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 7 Then you can tell them, ‘They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant went across.’ These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever.*

As I said last week on March 30<sup>th</sup> in the sermon titled *Uncrossable Rivers*: All Christians have the most important miracle in all of history in their lives. That is that God raised Jesus Christ from the grave. This overturned all the plans of Hell against mankind...for anyone who would believe in Jesus. A born-again Christian starts new life as he walks across the dry riverbed in his life. His river of sin has been taken away. His sins were nailed to the Cross with Jesus.

It is important that we remember to thank God often for our salvation, our Jordan River of sin dried up by the gift of Faith in Christ. But also, it is our duty to tell our children of this Great Salvation. Children at a young age understand or “feel” spiritual truth better than adults realize. That is why Jesus said boldly in **(Luke 18.16) 16** *Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children.*

**(Joshua 4.8-9)** says: **8** *So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. 9* *Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.* The book of Joshua was written by Joshua. Thus that would be about 1410 B.C. So, God kept the stone Memorial there for many years to remind His People. I expect that from 700B.C. to 600 B.C. the invading Assyrians and Babylonians destroyed such religious monuments.

**Reading (Joshua 4.10-11) 10** *Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as the Lord had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, 11* *and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the LORD and the priests came to the other side while the people watched.*

## **OBEDIENCE CROSSING UNCROSSABLE RIVERS**

Noting the obedient Israelites in **(Joshua 4.10)** *until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people.* We Christians have God's wonderful promises including “**Grace**” or **undeserved favor**. This means as we walk with Jesus to Heaven in this world of sin, God gives us more “undeserved favor” every day. He is quick to forgive us our sins, for Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on His Cross. So many Letters by the Apostles Peter and Paul began and ended with “*Grace and Peace,*” prayers and encouragements for these Believers. We may have had hearts

on fire with Love for Jesus, until we arrive at an impossible or uncrossable river. We then may be hardened from fear and anxiety at this new challenge. Without denying Grace, we must sometimes humble ourselves in those challenges to our faith. We must admit that as Christians we sometimes have acted like the people Jesus rebuked or scolded in **(Matthew 13.15)** *For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.* Unlike UNBELIEVERS, we BELIEVERS can turn to Jesus and He will heal us. He will soften our heart to hear His instructions with His love. Holy Spirit will give us courage to take the NEXT STEP into “our personal,” dangerous, uncrossable Jordan river. As God promised through Peter's Letter in **(2 Peter 3.18/KJV21)** *Rather, you must grow in the **grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and **forever!** Amen. AND.... (Hebrews 4.16) So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us **when we need it most.***

**We need grace most at our uncrossable Jordan Rivers. His grace will cause us to be obedient to take the NEXT STEP...into the River. After we cross that river, we experience as in (2 Corinthians 3.18/KJV21) 18** *But we all, with uncovered face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, **from glory to glory**, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* Thus we receive “Grace for Grace” to be changed “**from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**” **This means that every test of our faith and every trial in our lives is to make us more like Jesus, who is the Prince of Glory...glory to glory.**

What might the thoughts be for an Israelite who had just rushed quickly through the dried river bed of the Jordan River. Maybe: “Wow. God is great. I made it. Now I can relax as I am safely in my Promised Land!” Well...not exactly! The next verse tells us in **(Joshua 4.12-13) 12** *The armed warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh led the Israelites across the Jordan, just as Moses had directed. 13* *These armed men—about 40,000 strong—were ready for battle, and the LORD was with them as they crossed over to the plains of Jericho.*

Joshua, the Leader on Earth of the Israelites, knew fierce battles were ahead to “**completely possess the Promised Land.**” Christians today, like the Israelites, should know that a miracle to go forward with Jesus often includes conflict against the enemy, especially before the NEXT STEP is taken. We have the Presence of the Prince of Peace in our lives, but we are not yet in Heaven. There we will be with Jesus and Satan will be banned entrance. The Israelites were prepared for battle as *The armed warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh led the*

*Israelites across the Jordan,* Similar or like that, all Christians need the Armor of God. It was not Moses but Paul who instructed Christians in **(Ephesians 6.10-11)** *10 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.* The results of a Christian's fight against the devil are not a question. Any Christian willing to fight with God's Armor is **guaranteed Victory in all areas of life!!!** **It says so in (Ephesians 6.11)** *Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.*

Next we read in **(Joshua 4.14)** *That day the LORD made Joshua a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites, and for the rest of his life they revered him as much as they had revered Moses.*

Joshua finally had his “job security.” He could freely hear from the Lord, His Boss, and give instructions to the large community of Israelites with confidence.

Then in **(Joshua 4.15-20)** *15 The LORD had said to Joshua, 16 “Command the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant[a] to come up out of the riverbed.” 17 So Joshua gave the command. 18 As soon as the priests carrying the Ark of the LORD's Covenant came up out of the riverbed and their feet were on high ground, the water of the Jordan returned and overflowed its banks as before. 19 The people crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. Then they camped at Gilgal, just east of Jericho. 20 It was there at Gilgal that Joshua piled up the twelve stones taken from the Jordan River.* As Israel took the Promised Land they renamed most cities or camping areas. They called this one “Gilgal” which means “to roll away.” We will see this later in **(Joshua 5.9).**

In **(Joshua 4.21-24)** *21 Then Joshua said to the Israelites, “In the future your children will ask, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 22 Then you can tell them, ‘This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ 23 For the LORD your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and he kept it dry until you were all across, just as he did at the Red Sea when he dried it up until we had all crossed over. 24 He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the LORD's hand is powerful, and so you might fear the LORD your God forever.”*

So Joshua, a good teacher, repeats what he had told the people in **(Joshua 4.6-7)** regarding the 12 Stone Memorial. But now he emphasizes the miracle that the people saw. **(Joshua 4.22-24)** *22 Then you can tell them, ‘This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ 23 For the LORD your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and he kept it dry until you were all across, just as he did at the Red Sea when he dried it up until we had all crossed over. 24 He did*

*this so all the nations of the earth might know that the LORD's hand is powerful, and so you might fear the LORD your God forever."*

When Jesus came to Earth He fully revealed and showed what God is like. For the Bible tells us in **(John 1.18)** *No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is **himself** God, is near to the Father's heart. He has **revealed** God to us.* As Jesus is the **WORD of God**, there is even a better figure of speech we can imagine from **(John 1.18/NASB1995)** *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* So we can be correct to think of this as the **WORD OF GOD EXPLAINED GOD TO US.**

So, the Israelites needed to keep in their minds as the highest priority, or top subject, as in **(Proverbs 9.10)** *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*

I see three points here:

- 1) Unbelievers often need fear of Judgment to call on Jesus as Saviour.
- 2) Born-Again Christians need to remember and keep the top subject or priority that "God loves them as His dear Children." The Bible tells us in **(1 John 3.1)** *See how very much our **Father** loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is **what** we are!*
- 3) Born-Again Christians still need a certain sense of fear when they are convinced of a sin they committed. This is a humble attitude that has God's Children run to, not away, from God.

**(Joshua 5.1)** *When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings who lived along the Mediterranean coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan River so the people of Israel could cross, they lost heart and were paralyzed with fear because of them.*

I will say again, what I know:" Our spiritual enemy, the Devil, is afraid of every Christian. This includes the weaker faith and stronger faith Believer in Jesus. For every Christian reminds the devil of his defeat by Jesus on the Cross. That is where Jesus bruised the devil's head. Whenever the Devil looks at a true Christian, he sees Jesus ...and the Devil trembles!

### **STEP INTO WAR...NOT YET**

Now, the Israelites could have depended on their confidence and their weapons of war and charged ahead to Jericho. But the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, made it clear to Joshua where their strength came from. God calls for a renewal of faith in the Faith of Father Abraham by the covenant of circumcision. Reading **(Joshua 5.2-3)** *2 At that time the LORD told Joshua, "Make*

*flint knives and circumcise this second generation of Israelites. ” 3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the entire male population of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.*

**(Genesis 17.9-11)** *9 Then God said to Abraham, “Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. 10 This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. 11 You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. It is important that we remember that the covenant between God and Abraham was first of all a covenant of Faith. The Apostle Paul makes that clear in (Romans 4.3) For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” God's desire and intention was that all Israelites would have faith in Him. The outward sign to show their commitment, to keep covenant with Him, was circumcision.*

Next in **(Joshua 5.4-8)** *Joshua had to circumcise them because all the men who were old enough to fight in battle when they left Egypt had died in the wilderness. 5 Those who left Egypt had all been circumcised, but none of those born after the Exodus, during the years in the wilderness, had been circumcised. 6 The Israelites had traveled in the wilderness for forty years until all the men who were old enough to fight in battle when they left Egypt had died. For they had disobeyed the LORD, and the LORD vowed he would not let them enter the land he had sworn to give us—a land flowing with milk and honey. 7 So Joshua circumcised their sons—those who had grown up to take their fathers' places—for they had not been circumcised on the way to the Promised Land. 8 After all the males had been circumcised, they rested in the camp until they were healed.*

## **FAITH AND FOOLISHNESS**

Often times Jesus asks His people to do something that the world, or maybe even some Christians, will call *foolish*. The Leader of the Israelites, Joshua, and other men in the camp had fought bloody wars against overwhelming odds. This was while they traveled through the wilderness. One that made them most famous throughout the lands is recorded in **(Numbers 21.21—25)**: *21 The Israelites sent ambassadors to King Sihon of the Amorites with this message: 22 “Let us travel through your land. We will be careful not to go through your fields and vineyards. We won't even drink water from your wells. We will stay on the king's road until we have passed through your territory.” 23 But King Sihon refused to let them cross his territory. Instead, he mobilized his entire army and attacked Israel in the wilderness, engaging them in battle at Jahaz. 24 But the Israelites slaughtered them with their swords and occupied their land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River. They went only as far as the Ammonite border because the boundary of the*

*Ammonites was fortified. 25 So Israel captured all the towns of the Amorites and settled in them, including the city of Heshbon and its surrounding villages*

Now, across the Jordan River, they were ready with their swords and spears again. But the Lord called for a spiritual renewal first. This renewal was obedience to the covenant of circumcision. Therefore the Israelite fighting soldiers were camped in enemy territory. Yet, the Lord then made them incapable of fighting for some period of time to heal after their circumcision. Whenever you really hear from God, do not worry about any accusations of *foolishness*. He knows the strength and location of all the enemies of His Chosen People...then and now!

#### NEW TESTAMENT CIRCUMCISION---OF THE HEART

Jesus set all Believers free from any demands of the Law. This includes the Jews, the biological descendants of Abraham, and the Gentile Believers.

The Apostle Paul teaches this to the Christians in Colossae in **(Colossians 2.10-12)** *10 So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.*

*11 When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. 12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. Jewish Believers in Jesus are free to continue their habits of heritage including circumcision. But Paul warned Jewish Christians that it had nothing to do with Salvation. We read this is in **(Galatians 5.1-6)** *So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. 2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. 4 For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace. 5 But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. 6 For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.**

Now the Lord lets His people know that they are restored to their relationship with Him. This is the relationship He showed to them as He delivered them from Pharaoh's murderous hand of slavery in Egypt. We see this in **(Joshua 5.9)** *Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the shame of your slavery in Egypt.” So that place has been called Gilgal to this day.*

NOTE: Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word “galal,” meaning “to roll.”

Many sincere Christians had followed Jesus for years but then somehow, they were discouraged and did not try to keep in a close relationship. Someone or something crushed their hearts with pain. They blamed God or simply seemed to drift away. Jesus promised to never leave us or forsake us in **(Hebrews 13.5)** *...for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,”*

The Bible also tells us in **(2 Timothy 2.13)** *If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.* So, after God has drawn these dear Believers He loves back close to Jesus, they also have a personal *Gilgal*. They can sing again as in their early days in Christ, my sins have been washed and rolled away. They can now say, as in the Praise Song:

***O God, You are my God, I will ever praise You***

***I will seek You in the morning, and learn to know Your ways,***

***Step by step You will lead me***

***And I will follow You all of my days***

They are again free to follow Jesus, STEP BY STEP, to cross any *uncrossable* Jordan Rivers in life. They know that He will lead them until they see Him face to face in Glory.

***Let Us Pray,***

## REFERENCES

AMP- *Amplified Bible*, Copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, CA 90631.

KJ21- *21<sup>st</sup> Century King James' Version*, Dueuel Enterprises 1991

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