



A Passion for Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 1:1-11)

As we are at the dawn of a new year, this is a good time to reflect on where we have come from and where we are going. What was your 2004 like? One of my personal observations is that for many of us in this fellowship, we shall not be looking at it with the fondest of memories. We found many aspects of the year very difficult and I know that many of you had a much harder time than us. It's sometimes the hard times that we remember and forget the blessings.

I'm sure the people of Israel felt that way as they left the wilderness and looked over to the promised land that they were to shortly enter. I'm sure they reflected on the long years they spent wandering from camp to camp. In fact apart from two people, they had all been born there. Into their memory came the fact that none of their parents except Joshua and Caleb who left Egypt were to enter the land. It had been a long and hard road for them and they had never lived in proper houses or farmed land. They had been attacked by the surrounding nations. It was a difficult existence.

But to be fair, in their wilderness struggles they had come to follow and trust their God who had sustained them the past forty years. It may have been a difficult time, but this group of people were willing to follow the promises of God and cross the Jordan and move into the land that God had promised.

Wilderness experiences are common for everybody, both as individuals, churches, organisations or nations. Maybe you feel that in some ways 2004 may have been a bit of a wilderness experience as I've already suggested. Perhaps as you have thought upon your personal difficulties in the last few days, you may well have realised that they are perhaps nothing compared to what people in Indian Ocean nations have experienced this week.

As a church we have come through a difficult period in the history of the church. I guess that the last decade has been traumatic in many ways. There has been a turnover in the membership: the people here now are very different to who we had 10 years ago and that's even true of the last two years. We have gone through all the challenges of embracing change as well as having to deal with the long-standing problems with the church building.

But as we look in the Bible we find that all of it was leading up to a promised land and the passage we had read this morning is the turning point. With the promise of newness to the people of Israel was the promise that they were going to enter into an exciting new phase of their nationhood. Their difficult past was going to slip away and be replaced by a new future.

This is a great message for a new year because it is a crossroads in our calendar where it is time to reflect, time to move on or time to do new things. We may feel in life that there are current difficulties, but as the people of God, hope is something that always lies in front of us. Hope is something that drives us forward and without hope life is something that can be difficult to live. Whether that is as individuals or as a fellowship of God's people, we should look forward to what God has for us.

There was only one catch for the Israelites - they had to conquer the promised land first! It was a land full of hostile people, warriors, giants and the rest of it. I suspect for some of them, they felt like staying in the wilderness at that point. After all, for all but two of them, the wilderness was all they knew - at least they were kind of comfortable with it.

Are you comfy this morning? As some of you are visitors I don't know where you come from. Maybe you would say to me. Yep, I'm very comfy in life - so why would I need to change and look for something better. I've got what I want. Good for you. But how long will it last? Forever? God's

promises and His hope last a long time. God wants you to turn around and step across the Jordan with Him this morning.

We all experience discouragement and difficulties in our lives. Christians are not immune from them. I believe that God is saying to each one of us this morning, turn from that and cross the Jordan with Him.

Maybe you are a SBC faithful. Are you comfy? Not on these chairs and certainly not on the pews! But you know what I mean. Have you got as far as you think you can go with God? Do you fancy another dose of change and new things happening at SBC? Perhaps not. It's always more comfortable to stick with what you are familiar. But God wants us to see that we are and should be more than what we currently experience.

2005 is going to be a very different year for us I believe. Apart from the fact we are going to see what our building really looks like - a new experience for most of you - but we are going to explore building in different ways. The problem is, that change means challenge. In our new series, heart of Fellowship in the coming weeks we are going to explore some of these. Challenge means cost, commitment, perseverance – but it means blessing too. Can we face it? God is saying, come and cross the Jordan with me and experience the promised land. In many ways we have seen the blessing of God in the last year. That's a down payment – now He wants to lead us into a new land – a different land. They were given a promise in Joshua 3:4 *Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.* The blessings are not in the wilderness, but in the promised land. Let's walk where we've never walked before.

As Joshua contemplated challenge and change, what promises did God give him and the people. Here are three from Joshua 1.

I will never leave you

5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

This is a great promise for all those who seek to step out and follow God. as we step over the Jordan, I believe this is a promise we should claim too. We have a God who never leaves or forsakes those that walk with Him. I reckon that all Christians know it, but few ever walk in the reality of it. God never leaves or forsakes us. As we'll see tonight, the people of Israel didn't follow Him in later centuries and they ended up in exile. But God never forsook His promises to them and they were restored.

The call to each one of us and as a church this morning is to cross the Jordan and follow Him. never mind what our Jordan may be, as we follow Him, we find this promise: *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* But in itself, this promise is not effective unless we cross the Jordan, unless we enter the promised land, unless we battle the giants and win.

Be strong and courageous

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous.

This is much more proactive than just following. Let's make no bones about this. Life can be a battle. Trying to live as a Christian in a world that isn't very Christian is a battle. Following Jesus is a battle. If you've been coming here a while you'll know all about this. Following Jesus is a battle, but it's one that if you trust God you can't lose. Be strong and courageous. Being a Christian is not for the weak willed. Some people believe that being a Christian is a mark of weakness. It's some kind of emotional crutch. Rubbish! In this world today, it takes courage to stand out from the crowd and say who you are. To stand up for that which is true, moral and just. Too many Christians stand back and do nothing and let the world steal our freedoms away from us. People died for freedom of speech, freedom of belief and the rest of it. Most people are so cowardly that they never even go as far as to trust God in the first place. Life is easier without having your values challenged or acquiring a moral conscience. As Paul said : If God is for us, who can be against us?

God wants to do a new thing in this land. revival always starts amongst God's people. We are being called to leave our comfort zones and be bold and courageous in those we speak to and the things

we stand for. Let' s finish blending and stand out from the crowd.

Obey God

Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

The third thing Joshua was called to was to obey: to follow where God was leading. It' s logical really. If they were to go into what was a dangerous mission in kingdom, following God was the only sure way they were to succeed. This is a story of hope that was achieved through crossing the Jordan and entering the promised land. It was a battle they couldn' t lose in theory, but they had to listen and do what God was saying to them.

Following is about discovering God' s will and doing it. As we enter 2005 we have a Jordan to cross. We cross and enter the promised land doing it God' s way, or we stay in the wilderness by doing it our way. 2005 faces us with Jordan. Maybe you' ve never trusted Christ or followed Him. Maybe you' ve never thought too much about the things of God. But this morning, God faces you with a choice. You either follow Him into something new and exciting in life – or you stay where you are and never reach your potential as a human being. You have an invitation this morning from God to follow Him Jesus died for you, to deal with your sins and make a way for you to know God and follow Him. This 2005 why not cross the Jordan that God is facing you with and follow Him?

As a fellowship here in Swaffham, we also have a Jordan to cross. There is building work to be done. In the first couple of months it' s going to be literal building. But we face the challenge of spiritual building too. We shall be doing some new things this year and doing some older things in a different way. I' ve said on many occasions that I believe that God is wanting to pour out His Spirit afresh in Norfolk but if we want to enter the promised land then WE have to cross Jordan, WE need to be bold and courageous, WE need to seek God' s will and do it.

We have the same power and presence of God that the Israelites did. We have the same God but if we want to see His power manifest in our lives, then we need to cross Jordan and follow Him. We' ve been in the wilderness too long. Let' s cross together and see God at work.

On an individual level, you too may be at a turning point in your life. For the Simpson family it is a turning point because they are giving thanks for the new life that has been brought into their family and have dedicated themselves to bring Alice up before God. Perhaps the reason why you are here this morning is that God wants to bring you to a turning point in your life.

If you know Christ, then 2005 should be a turning point for you. Cross the Jordan and leave whatever was holding you back from following as fully as you could have in 2004 whether that be disappointment, personal difficulties, spiritual barrenness, ill-health or just plain self-centredness. Be filled afresh with His Spirit and follow Him and let Him pour out His blessings on you.



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