



The Undiscovered Country

Joshua 1:1-8

Isn't that something to do with Star Trek? Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country

“The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns” Part of the “To be or not to be” speech by Hamlet who describes death as ***“the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns”***. The word “bourn” means a boundary or it can also mean a stream. Streams often mark boundaries. It's something you cross which of course you do if you want to get from one bank to the other. These words are often used to refer to the future as one makes a step forward into the unknown from which there is no return.

There have been famous river crossing events that have changed history. Julius Caesar committed himself to marching on Rome when he crossed the Rubicon river in 49BC. For him it was the point of no return – it was either victory or defeat.

In Star Trek VI the words from Shakespeare were used by Chancellor Gorkon of the Klingon Empire as he proposed a peace treaty with their sworn enemies, the Federation. The prospect of peace brought challenges to people who have always seen each other as enemies, to now be friends and allies, such as Captain James T Kirk who hated the Klingons because they murdered his son. The undiscovered country there was establishing a peace between sides that had always been sworn enemies.

And we come to the piece of history we read this morning as Joshua prepares to take the people over the Jordan and into the promised land. To them it was an undiscovered country. An unknown land where there were stories of heavily defended cities inhabited by giants. And God had called them to go and take it. And as we shall see in a few moments, we would expect feelings to be mixed.

We are at the end of the old year and at the dawn of a new one. It's a time to reflect. What was your 2007 like? For me it will go down as partly memorable and partly forgettable. Rhiannon and I found many aspects of the year very difficult and I'm sure there are many of you that had difficult times too. It's sometimes the hard times that we remember and forget the blessings. But I've still got to say, that we have a God who never lets us down.

I'm not 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 who left Egypt were to enter the land, except Joshua and Caleb. 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. And God had punished them for their grumbling and rebellion. It was a difficult existence. How could they now be confident of God's blessing?

To an extent some of the promise was already coming true. They had already captured much land east of the Jordan and that was good, 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. They were going to take the rest which was a far larger task, which they would have faced with some trepidation. 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 and in Church 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? Not on these pews! 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? Maybe you're comfy with what we've got as a church here at Maidstone Road. How long will that last? We're on a journey to a promised land and that land we inherit when we go to be with Him. Until then we remain on the move. There are battles to be fought, cities to be won, people to be saved - and Jordans to be crossed. There is no standing still. The only certain thing in church and in our lives is change - that's the nature of life, whether we like it or not.

And comfy Christians? Look in the New Testament. As far as I can see, there is no reference to being comfortable whatsoever. There is a word used for comforting others, but nothing for being comfortable. There's no such thing as being comfy in God's vocabulary. Armies that are comfy and settled don't do battle, don't want to move and embrace change get wiped out by the enemy.

God's promises and His hope last a long time. And from time to time he wants us to cross Jordans and enter new lands, doing unfamiliar things in unfamiliar territory. I believe that God wants us to turn around and step across the Jordan with Him this morning.

In one way we are going to celebrate who we are and where we've come from in 2008, but as part of that we will realise that our forefathers recognised that to move forward as a church, they had to embrace change because society changes, the area changes, the town changes and we have to adapt and change and that involves crossing Jordans and entering an undiscovered country.

So where is our direction in 2008? Do you like entering the unknown, doing different things in new ways? Some people do, most don't because being comfy seems far better. Yet our challenge is that if as a church we want to grow, then that by its definition means change. We need to change. Change our way of thinking, change our way of doing God's work - change our way of being God's people.

Next week and over the coming weeks I am going to explain what that might mean for us as a church. But before Joshua entered the land, he was given a number of promises by God. They weren't just going to be people that were going to go up the road and capture one or two towns - As I told Moses, I have given you and all my people the entire land that you will be marching over. 4 Your borders will reach from the desert in the south to the Lebanon Mountains in the north; from the great Euphrates River in the east, through the Hittite country, to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

Actually, in the end it took them a few generations to enlarge the nation that much, but in a few short years they captured and occupied Canaan. Why? Because they had big vision. What about our vision for Maidstone Road? And the church of God generally in Felixstowe? Can towns like ours really be transformed for Christ in an age where the church of God is contracting? The answer is yes - it's already happening in some parts of Britain. We will explore that in a coming week but if you can't wait then come tonight for a preview of that.

If we're being asked to believe great things, then we must realise we can believe them because we've got a powerful God who is behind us, is with us and goes before us.

So Joshua receives these words in the early part of the chapter which are effectively what in the Army were Joshua's rules of engagement.

◆ I am always with you (I will never leave you nor forsake you)

5 Joshua, no one will be able to defeat you as long as you live. I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will always be with you; I will never abandon 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. (NIV)

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 determined and confident (Be strong and courageous)

6 Be determined and confident, for you will be the leader of these people as they occupy this land which I promised their ancestors. 7 Just be determined, be confident

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. (NIV)

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 a Christian 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. Satan attacks anyone who trusts Jesus. He tries to break our families, our marriages, our friendships, our churches, our church leaders. If we want to move forward as a church, then be ready to be determined and courageous – because you are making war against satan and he doesn't like it.

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. 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. Because that's when we will make the difference in our community, in our families, in our jobs and amongst our friends. Let's finish blending and stand out from the crowd.

◆ Obey God

... and make sure that you obey the whole Law that my servant Moses gave you. Do not neglect any part of it and you will succeed wherever you go.

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. (NIV)

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, obeying 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 2008 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. Today God faces us with the 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. Why not cross the Jordan that God is facing you with and follow Him?

But as a church we are also faced with Jordan. We face the challenge of reaping God's harvest in Felixstowe. We've done a lot of sowing over the years, but now we have to learn new skills, unlearn and re-learn some old ones, do some older things in a new or revitalised way. Most of all obey God and that means that we need to re-learn values such as commitment and integrity, because in our community, those are some of the most sought after values. And sadly Christians aren't often associated with them these days. We have work to do! That's the area in which we need revival.

The great thing is that 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.

Let's commit ourselves to cross the Jordan, to move in the strength of God, be courageous and be ready to obey Him. Be filled afresh with His Spirit and follow Him and let Him pour out His blessings on you.

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30/12/07 MRBC Felixstowe
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