

Remembering God's Works
Allen Power
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Joshua 3:14-4:9

If you summed up the situation in Joshua chapter 3 with one word, that word would be “IMPOSSIBLE.” The Merriam-Webster definition of impossible is “incapable of being or of occurring.”¹ There are moments in life when our path forward seems blocked by an impossible obstacle. We can't turn back, we can't go around it, and we can't ignore it. We must trust God and move forward. What are some examples of those moments?

The point: I would amend the dictionary definition of impossible to read: “*incapable of being or occurring...apart from the power of God.*” Jesus said, “*Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.*” (Matthew 19:26 NLT) In essence, God told Joshua, “*I'm sending you and the people of Israel into an impossible situation so I can show my power to take care of my people. Things look impossible, but I will make a way for you.*” (Jos. 3:7) That promise is still true for Christ-followers today.

A little context before the text. In Joshua chapter one God told Joshua (and the people) to be “strong and courageous” as they moved to take the Promised Land. First, they faced an impossible situation: crossing the Jordan River at flood stage. The only way to the Promised Land was through moving water that was more than a mile wide, 5 to 10 feet deep, and there was no bridge or boat. Every man, woman, boy and girl had to cross. Imagine their fear; but Joshua knew that God had a plan. He always does.

(NLT) — 14 So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. **15** It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, **16** the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho. **17** Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord's Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

- I find nowhere in this text that the people panicked or resisted the plan. Nowhere do we read them saying, “*Joshua, you're crazy! The Ark of the Covenant is going to be swept away and us with it!*” What do you think gave Joshua and the people confidence that God would make a way through the Jordan River?
- I don't think we can assume that none of the Israelites were fearful, but scripture doesn't reveal the problems we saw with their parents and grandparents: At the Red Sea, the people panicked and complained to Moses (Ex. 14:10-12). At Kadesh Barnea, they refused to enter the land because of fear (Numbers 13-14).

Throughout the wilderness years, grumbling was common. Why do you think this generation was less rebellious and more obedient?

- Why do you think God waited until the priests stepped into the water before stopping the river? How is "getting our feet wet" before God delivers us a good lesson for Christ-followers today?
- When you believe God is calling you to something you must "get your feet wet" and step out in faith depending on Him to make a way for you.
- Illustration: God calling us to Atlanta (the short version). Now a new chapter.
- Why do you think God often reveals only the next step instead of the entire plan?
- The miracle at the Jordan was not only a test of God's power; it was also a test of Israel's obedience. Unlike their parents' generation, this generation stepped forward when God said, "Go."
- The Ark of the Covenant represented God's presence. What is the lesson for us?
- We can trust God's presence when we face impossible situations. Under the New Covenant we follow Jesus, Who gave us His Spirit to live in us promising, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).
- Here's a challenge for us humans: Impossible situations often produce "spiritual amnesia"—we sometimes forget God's past faithfulness when facing a new challenge.
- Someone has said, "*Faith remembers. Fear forgets.*"
- God knows about our tendency to forget His past faithfulness. He instructed the Israelites to construct a memorial to help them remember.

1 When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, **2** "Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. **3** Tell them, 'Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.' " **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." **8** So the men did as Joshua had commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River, one for each tribe, just as the Lord had told Joshua. They carried them to the place where they camped for the night and constructed the memorial there. **9** Joshua also set up another pile of twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing. And they are there to this day.

- Twelve stones on the shore and twelve stones in the water.
- When we go to Washington, D.C. we are surrounded by statues and monuments.
- They are stately and especially striking at night, but they are more than architectural landmarks; they are there to remind us how we got here.

- In the same way, we NEED to be reminded of how God has made a way in our past. What helps us with that? Reading His word reminds us of His past faithfulness. Thanking Him in prayer for His deliverance can help. Singing certain hymns or songs can refresh our confidence in His character and faithfulness.

- Don Moen had one of those songs:

*“God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me
He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way.”ⁱⁱ*

- In this miracle God backed up the water and they walked across. Happy ending!
- That is kind of a neat and tidy answer, but it is not always how God works.
- It is true that God is omnipotent (all powerful) and loving, but how He makes a way may not be how WE would like Him to.
- There is the age-old question: *“If God can do anything...why doesn’t He?”*
- We think about Job. Job said to God in Job 42:2: *“I know that you can do anything...”ⁱⁱⁱ* And then Job apologized for questioning God’s sovereign purposes when he could not understand what God was doing.
- At the end of Job we tend to focus on how God restored Job’s life with even more blessings, but God never explained to Job why He allowed him to suffer.
- Tim Keller said, *“The book of Job never gives Job the reason for his suffering. Instead, it gives him God.”*
- *“If God can do anything...why doesn’t He?”* No easy answer; but here is truth: **Isaiah 55:8–9 (NLT)** — **8** “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. **9** For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.
- There is a quote attributed to Charles Spurgeon, really a paraphrase of something he wrote: *“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”^{iv}*
- Those stones of remembrance they set up were not just for that generation.

Joshua 4:21–24 (NLT) — **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.”

- The lesson is plain: Talk with your children and grandchildren about how God made a way when things looked impossible. What better gift can you give them?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- God had four purposes in this situation: 1) To teach the people to trust Him. 2) To teach them to obey Him. 3) To show them God had His hand on Joshua (3:7) and 4) To reassure them (as we just read) "the Lord's hand is powerful."
- He accomplished all that using an impossible situation and a flooding river.
- When I was a boy, we sang another song based on this morning's text:

"Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible. And He can do what no other power can do."^v

- This morning, I would ask, "Got any rivers?" Are you facing a situation that only God can handle for you? Are you facing a new chapter or challenge that feels like the Jordan River at flood stage without a bridge or a boat?
- Remember the advertising campaign, "Got Milk?" The point was that milk is essential in your diet, so you'd better be sure you have some in the fridge.
- When we face an impossible situation, the essential question is "Got Jesus?"

Jesus said in **John 15:5 (NLT)** — **5** "...apart from me you can do nothing."

- Don't try to deal with your "river" alone. He specializes in impossible situations.

Hebrews 13:5b–6 (NLT) — **5** ...God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." **6** So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?"

- If you are His follower, He never leaves, He never sleeps, He will make a way.

Philippians 4:13 (NLT) — **13** For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

- When we say, "*I can't do this on my own*" we are biblically correct and exactly where we need to be to receive His power if we will do everything through Him.

Matthew 19:26 (NLT) — **26** Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible."

- Looking at them "intently" tells me He was saying: "*Pay attention, this is important, with God everything is possible.*"
- Got any rivers?
- We all have them at some point in life.
- Got Jesus?
- He is all you need; He specializes in the impossible and He will make a way and be with us every step of the way.

ⁱ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). In *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*. (Eleventh ed.). Merriam-Webster, Inc.

ⁱⁱ "God Will Make A Way" Writer/s: Don Moen - Publisher: Integrity Music

iii Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Job 42:2). Tyndale House Publishers.

iv https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1403154-god-is-too-good-to-be-unkind-and-he-is?utm_source=chatgpt.com

v “Got Any Rivers?” – Oscar C. Eliason (1942) © Singpiration Music (ASCAP)