

Talks – New Year New Day (Joshua 3) – myfishbites.com

One thing the Covid virus pandemic meant was that things have constantly changed – lockdown, rules, changed rules, new ways of doing things and all kinds of differences in life. But we can always find help and hope from the Bible and learn from events that happened and the ways that God was involved!

So let's have a look at Joshua 3 in the Old Testament of the Bible and learn seven things to help us!

Joshua 3.1-8

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. Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, 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. 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."

Then Joshua told the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you." 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. 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. 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.'"

(New Living Translation, The Bible)

Lockdown and the Big Campout

In 2020 there was a huge national event called the 'Big Campout' to support and raise funds for front line workers in the NHS. People camped out in their gardens and raised money.

Back in Joshua 3 there was a 'big campout' for the people of Israel who were camped, getting ready to cross over the River Jordan into the Promised Land (a land that God had promised to give the people).

A famous speaker called Joyce Meyer says that God plans our 'steps' but that God also plans our 'stops'.

That means that God opens doors for us but sometimes God shuts doors to help us get ready for something or to protect us. While we are in lockdown or in times when things aren't 'normal' or things seem slow or God seems distant, it is often because God is doing something special. So trust him and just keep on going. God is at work and he is doing something new – getting you ready to 'cross over' your 'river' to something new! Time to get excited.

Worship

Back in the time of Joshua, the Israelite people had a group called the 'Levites' who were a bit like a full-time 'worship team' who were responsible for worship and serving God. These were the ones who God asked to lead the Israelites across the river.

So the way to the next move of God and being part of what God was doing was through worship. The same is true for us. Many times God speaks to us as we worship him. Worship includes music (and this is a big way of worshiping God) but it also includes spending time with God, serving him and obeying him. Psalm 95 talks about singing to and worshiping God. Then it says 'if you hear his voice... obey him'. So often we hear God's voice through worship. It's not a magic formula but it's simply about "God you are worth worshiping because you are God" and as you do this, you grow closer to God and understand his heart and hear his voice more!

And remember worship music isn't just one style of music!

New Day New Way

I once went to the mountains around Glencoe in Scotland. It was my first time there. Every single day we did a new mountain and a new challenge. Some mountains were high, some were ridges that were a bit scary and some walks were a bit more tame (one day we even found a massive deserted lodge that we explored!) But each day it was new and we had to rely on our skills to find our way!

In verse 4 of Joshua chapter 3, God told the people that they would be going somewhere they had never travelled before. God spoke to them to tell them to listen to and obey what he said.

During the time of Covid there have been so many changes and challenges. None of us have ever 'been this way' before. Back in the time of Jesus, he was walking and talking with his pals and said to them 'don't worry about tomorrow but let God give you the strength to face each day as it comes' and told them to pray for God to give them their daily bread (we pray this today, it's called the "Lord's Prayer"). The key was that God would give them what they needed each day. In Lamentations 3 (Old Testament book) we learn that God's goodness and help is new every day.

So with every change and every day, we can rely on and trust God to help us. Just ask him for his help any time of any day!

Social Distancing

In Joshua 3 God warned the people not to come too close to the Ark. (The Ark was like the living representation of God himself. God was saying he was holy and because he was so holy and the people were not holy, God told them to keep away to protect themselves).

One thing that God has shown us during this time of Covid is that we've realised (if we didn't already know!) that God is in charge and we are not. We are not ultimately in control of the world around us, God is.

Yes we can make a difference and we should make a difference by caring for people, animals, the environment and being active to leave things better than they were. But the

big boss over the whole of the universe, history and time is God. We are part of his story where he is the script writer, the designer and the director!

Be holy because God is holy

In Joshua 3 there is a big word called 'consecrate' in some translations of the Bible. In the New Living Translation it is translated as 'purify' yourself. So what does this mean? Is it just some religious ritual or something more?

It's a bit more with God because he looks at the heart rather than the 'skin'. What this means is that God looks at what's going on in our heart and mind rather than just the things we do. Why? Because the way we are on the inside reflects how we are on the outside. In the world around us, we're told it's the other way round but it's not.

Here is an example. A lot of TV shows like Strictly Come Dancing are all about glitz and glamour and lights and beautiful people. But this is all really fake because you don't get to know who people really are – just the way that TV shows them. If God was making a TV series he wouldn't spend loads of times on costumes, lights, make-up, beautiful people showing off in front of camera. What God would show is who you are when you're on your own. Or who you are when no-one is looking! He looks at why we do what we do, what we think, the words we say. God looks at the real 'you' rather than the fake 'you' that you see on TV programmes!

So when God told the people of Israel to 'purify' themselves (and when he says this to us today) what he means is – allow the Holy Spirit (the part of God who is on the inside of every Christian) to change you from the inside part of you. It means getting rid of bad things in your life with God's help and saying sorry to God when you mess up. So just ask for God's help!

Dealing with our 'ites'

The people of Israel were about to cross over a big river (with the help of a miracle from God) and go into a new land. But there were already some enemies in the new land who would have to be confronted and dealt with.

One of the many things humans and animals have to deal with is 'mites' and 'bites'. I was once by a river in Canada with my friend who is half Indian. He hardly got bitten but I got covered in mosquito bites! Another time I got a huge bite from a horse fly. If you haven't been bitten by a horsefly you don't want to be!

In life we will face different enemies and challenges. We need to know that God is with us to help us overcome anything we can face. He will do things in all kinds of ways, often amazing ways! Other times he will give us his awesome strength to help us come through anything. God is the 'Lord of the whole earth' (verse 11) so you can trust in God.

A speaker called Derek Prince once said he watched a small child holding on to and then falling asleep in the arms of his dad. As the child fell asleep he let go of his dad's arms. But his dad didn't let go of the child. He was safe in his dad's arms. That is who God is for us.

Nothing is impossible with God

There's a really famous clip of Indiana Jones (a classic set of movies with Harrison Ford) where he has to step out onto an invisible bridge over a huge ravine. As he steps out onto the invisible bridge it appears and he finds that it is solid, meaning he doesn't drop to his death! Which is nice.

Back in Joshua 3, the Levites we read about earlier were told by God to carry the Ark across the River Jordan. (The Levites were the only ones allowed to carry and go near the Ark). The Bible tells us that as they put their feet into the River Jordan the river stopped flowing (it backed up a few miles upstream) and the people were able to cross over on dry land. But this only happened as the Levites put their feet into the water while carrying the Ark.

So what's God saying to us through this? Well, we need to do things God's way. When we make big decisions (or even small ones) it's important to get God involved by just asking him to help, show you, lead you, be with you. When the people did things God's way and in God's timing, the waters opened up and God made a way into the new! It happened when the people 'took God with them' (as represented by the Ark).

It also tells us that nothing is impossible for God. A huge river drying up is nothing for God. A healed body is nothing for God, nor is healing broken families and hearts. God can make a way where things look impossible to us because he is the 'Lord of the whole earth'. This is his world, we are his people and he can do anything. But we need to listen for God, hear from him and then follow his plans. Sometimes God will tell us specifically what to do and other times he gives us complete freedom. God will never tell us to do anything that is against what he says in the Bible.

So if it's not against God's ways of doing things, don't be afraid to 'step out and find out' (that means ask God then try things. And expect the impossible!