

The Next Step

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[0 : 0 0] Lord's help and the Lord's enabling. If we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Joshua, the Old Testament book of Joshua, Joshua chapter 3, page 179 in the church Bible.

Joshua chapter 3, and if we just take as our text the words of verse 9. Joshua 3 and verse 9. Joshua said to the people of Israel, Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. Joshua said to the people of Israel, Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. As you know, watching a baby take their first step, it's always an exciting moment. It's always an encouraging moment because it's a sign that they're growing. It's a sign that they're getting stronger. It's a sign that they're moving on from being a baby to starting to toddle like a toddler.

[1 : 2 3] Now before you get ahead of yourselves, Matthew is nowhere near that stage yet. And even though he's 10 months old, I think taking his first step is probably a long way off.

Because being number four in the family, I think he's going to be the laziest. Because all he has to do is point at something. Or all he has to do is throw something off his high chair.

And he has, well, he's got three older brothers who will just go over and get it for him and just give it to him. And Matthew's happy. He's happy to just sit where he is. And he's comfortable sitting in his high chair.

He's happy to sit and watch others and point at others all around him. And as long as he doesn't have to move or do anything, he's comfortable and he's content.

As long as he doesn't have to move or do anything, he's comfortable and he's content. And it's amazing what you see when you're looking at a baby. Because I was thinking this week with our communion season ahead of us, I was thinking, well, there are some in our congregation, and they're in their 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s, who are doing exactly the same as 10-month-old Matthew.

[2 : 4 3] Because when it comes to taking the next step of faith in the Christian life, whether that step of faith is confessing Jesus as Lord, or committing your life to Jesus Christ, or coming to church on a Sunday evening or midweek, or even coming forward to the Lord's table and publicly professing your faith, instead of taking the next step, like little Matthew, far too many of you are happy to sit and stay where you are.

You're happy to watch others, maybe even point at others. But as long as you don't have to move, and as long as you don't have to do anything, you're comfortable and you're content where you are. You're comfortable and content where you are. My friend, does that describe you? Does that describe you? And you know, I believe the Bible is describing you this morning.

So do what Joshua says in the Bible. Joshua said to the people of Israel, Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God.

Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. Listen to what God is saying to you in His Word this morning. I want to look at this passage this morning, and I just want to use two simple headings, two S's, the scene, and of course, the step.

[4 : 1 6] The scene and the step. So first of all, the scene. Look at verse 7. The scene. The Lord said to Joshua, Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. You know, when breaking into a book of the Bible, it's always good to set the scene. It's always good to find out where exactly we are in the story.

Because, well, the book of Joshua, the book of Joshua is actually the sequel to the story of the Exodus. And the story of the Exodus, we studied it maybe a couple of years ago now, the story of

the Exodus, it's all about rescue.

It's all about redemption, in which the people of Israel, the congregation of Israel, they're under slavery and bondage from the fierce and ferocious Pharaoh in Egypt.

In fact, their slavery was so severe, and their bondage was so burdensome, that they repeatedly cried to the Lord, that they would be rescued, and that they would be redeemed.

[5 : 20] They cried to the Lord again and again, and the Lord heard them. The Lord raised up Moses, the man of God. And although Moses himself was full of fear, we saw time and time again at the beginning of the book of Exodus, he stands before this fierce and ferocious Pharaoh, and he proclaims to him, Let my people go.

Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go. But as you know, Pharaoh, he hardened his heart. He rejected the Lord's command. He stubbornly refused to let the people go.

And so the Lord sent plagues. He sent pestilence, in order to display and even demonstrate his power as the living and true God. But it wasn't until the plague of Passover that this fierce and ferocious Pharaoh was finally tamed.

Because when the angel of the Lord, when the angel of the Lord passed over Egypt, every firstborn son, from the playground all the way through to the palace, they all died.

And Pharaoh, he finally gave in. And he said to the Israelites, Go, get up, serve the Lord your God, as you have said. Just go. And of course, the only reason the Israelites' sons didn't die, you remember there in Exodus chapter 12, that during the Passover, they had the sign of the Passover.

[6 : 42] Because the sign of the Passover was that the Israelites, they were all sheltering under the shed and smeared blood of the Passover lamb. The Lord had said to them at the Passover, When I see the blood on the doorposts and the lintels of your homes, I will pass over.

When I see the blood, I will pass over. And because of this public proclamation, in their homes, the blood upon the lintel and the doorposts, the Israelites, they publicly proclaimed that they belonged to the Lord, which was, in many ways, the first picture, the first pointer of salvation in the Exodus.

And our Bible tells us, our Bible teaches us, that when we are sheltering under the shed and smeared blood of our Passover lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, we belong to him.

When we are sheltering under his blood, we are bought by him. And we have a responsibility, just like the Israelites did, to publicly proclaim that we belong to him, to publicly proclaim that we've been bought by him.

And we do that, we'll do it God willing, next Lord's Day, by sitting at the Lord's table. We're publicly proclaiming that we have been rescued. We have been redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

[8 : 08] But as you know, you follow the story of the Exodus. And it was following the Passover that the Israelites, they all escaped from Egypt. There was this mass exodus of nearly two million Israelites who were brought out of slavery and brought closer towards salvation.

But if you know the story of the Exodus, you'll know that salvation from slavery wasn't all simple and straightforward. Because as soon as the Israelites, as soon as they crossed the Red Sea, they started to moan.

They started to moan. No surprise, we're all good at moaning. They started to moan at Moses. They started to question and query what God was doing. They started to doubt. As soon as they crossed the Red Sea, they'd seen the Red Sea part before their eyes.

They'd passed through it. And yet they started to question and query what God is doing. They started to doubt. They became disgruntled and dissatisfied and disappointed and displeased with God and His servant Moses.

And yet when they were hungry, God fed them. He fed them manna from heaven. When they were thirsty, God gave them water to drink from the rock. But that wasn't good enough.

[9 : 23] Because many of them, they wanted to go back to slavery and bondage in Egypt. And sadly, all of it, it stunted their growth in grace and it stopped them from entering the promised land.

It stunted their growth in grace and stopped them from entering the promised land. Because for 40 years, for 40 years, they wandered around in the wilderness.

They wandered around in the wilderness. But the story of the Exodus, it isn't the end of the story.

That's why we have the sequel in the story here in the book of Joshua, where Joshua, the book of Joshua, picks up where Moses left off.

Because in the concluding chapter of the previous book, which is the book of Deuteronomy, we read that after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness with the people of Israel, Moses, the man of God, he dies.

And God buries him. So Moses dies, and God buries him. And Moses dies because Moses wasn't the one to bring them into the promised land.

[10:28] No, that role and responsibility, that was left to his successor, to whom this sequel in the story is all about. Joshua.

Because Joshua, he's a warrior. Joshua was the servant of the Lord. He served alongside Moses throughout those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

But Joshua, he was the next generation. And with Moses, the man of God, now gone, Joshua knew that he had big boots to fill. And like every sinner who steps forward to serve the Lord, Joshua himself, he had worries.

He had many wobbles as a servant of the Lord. He had lots of anxiety about taking over. He had so many anxious thoughts about what he was going to do, which is why the Lord repeatedly exhorts and even encourages Joshua in the first chapter of the book.

Because in Joshua chapter 1, the Lord says again and again and again, and you read it. Great chapter to read. The Lord says to Joshua, be strong and courageous.

[11:36] Be strong and courageous. Be strong and courageous. Don't be frightened. Don't be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. And the Lord kept bringing before Joshua this wonderful promise.

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. As I was with Moses in the past, so I will be with you in the present. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

And the Lord gave Joshua this assurance. Because Moses wasn't the one to bring people into the promised land. Joshua was. And you know, it's fascinating.

It's even fitting that it was Joshua who was to bring the people into the promised land. Because the name Joshua in Hebrew, it's Yeshua.

In Greek, it's Jesus or Jesus. And as you know, the name Jesus means Savior, salvation.

[12:36] They called his name Jesus for he would save his people from their sins. So who better to bring the people into the promised land than the Savior?

Who better to bring them into the place of blessing, the land flowing with milk and honey, than the Savior himself? And you know, this is something we often miss. This is something we often misunderstand about all these pictures and pointers in the Old Testament.

Because we often see the Exodus from Egypt as a picture and pointer of rescue and redemption from slavery to sin through Jesus Christ. And that's true.

But that's often where we stop in the story of salvation. We often just stop there and rescue and redemption. And yet, as we said, the story of the Exodus, that's not the end of the story.

Because there's a sequel to the story. There's a second part to the story which involves the Savior bringing his people into the place of blessing, into the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of blessings and benefits of salvation.

[13:43] And that's the picture and pointer of this passage. That as Christians, we're not only brought out of slavery to sin, we're also brought into the promises of God's blessing.

We receive every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. We're brought out and we're brought in. In fact, it was in the wilderness that Moses promised the people of Israel.

He said to the people of Israel, it's in the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord brought us out that He might bring us in. The Lord brought us out that He might bring us in.

And this is why the New Testament, all the New Testament writers, they repeatedly remind us and reaffirm to us that we've been brought out to be brought in. We've been brought out of sin to be brought into salvation, brought out of darkness and brought into the marvelous light, out of death into life, out of the dungeon of slavery into liberty and freedom in Christ.

We're brought out and we're brought in. But, and this is an important but, it's actually key to the whole passage, to be brought out and to be brought in requires taking a step.

[15:15] It requires taking the next step, which is what we see secondly. To be brought out and to be brought in requires taking the next step.

So we've seen the scene. The passage sets the scene, but then secondly, the step. Look at verse 12. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each man a tribe, or each tribe a

man.

And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.

So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water, now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of the harvest.

The waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zeratham.

[16 : 28] And those flowing down toward the sea of the Areba, the salt sea, were completely cut off, and the people passed over opposite Jericho.

Now have you ever noticed how often the Bible mentions our steps? Have you ever noticed how often the Bible mentions our steps?

David says that throughout the Psalms, we sang it there in Psalm 37, that the steps of a good man, they are ordered by the Lord. David also says in other Psalms that the Lord directs your steps, the Lord keeps your steps secure, the Lord watches over your steps, even though your steps nearly slipped.

Solomon, in all his wisdom, he wrote in his sermon, Ecclesiastes, a great sermon, he said, guard your steps. Guard your steps when you go to the house of God and be ready to listen.

That's a good one for a Sunday morning. Guard your steps when you go to the house of God and be ready to listen. Paul exhorted the church in the New Testament to keep in step with the Spirit and to keep your conduct in step with the truth of the gospel.

[17 : 46] And Peter encourages us in his letter, he says, remember that Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

You know, our Bible mentions our steps so often because our steps are important to the Lord. our steps are important to the Lord.

But as you know, we always need to take a step in the right direction. We need to take a step in the right direction because we can't go back. We can't step to the left hand or to the right hand.

We can't step down and we can't step out of line. No, we need to step forward. We need to step forward. We need to take the next step. We need to take the first step.

And you know, this was an issue for Israel. This was a concern for the congregation in Israel because this is what was hampering their growth in grace.

[18 : 49] This is what was hindering all these blessings and benefits of salvation becoming theirs, that they needed to take the next step. They needed to take the next step.

But for them, the next step, it seemed insurmountable. It seemed absolutely impossible. The next step, it seemed like this overwhelming obstacle in their life.

Because as the congregation of Israel, as they stood on the banks of the River Jordan, as we read there in chapter 3, they looked at the banks of the River Jordan and what was before them and in their eyes that were lacking faith, they saw that there's no way forward.

There's no way forward. The River Jordan, as we read just in those last few verses, it was fast flowing. The River Jordan was full to overflowing.

In fact, it said throughout the year, the River Jordan was actually only about 100 foot wide, usually. But during the rainy season or the harvest, the time of harvest, as is mentioned there in verse 15, during the harvest time, the banks of the river, they would burst.

[20 : 00] And the width of the river would obviously widen. And it would widen up to anything about a mile wide. And so the Israelites, they're told, you need to take a step.

You need to take the next step. But in front of them, the banks of the River Jordan, they're bursting. They're overflowing. They're overwhelming. The people, they're full of fear. They're lacking in faith, thinking, well, there's no way forward.

There's no way forward. They feel absolutely stuck where they are. And they're standing still. And they think, there's no way forward. And as the congregation of Israel stood there at the banks of the River Jordan, they just think, well, this next step that we're being told to take, it seems insurmountable.

And it seems absolutely impossible. But the thing is, the congregation of Israel, they had been here before. They had all been here before.

This is almost an instance of *deja vu*. I'm sure you've all had that feeling before, where you feel you've been somewhere before. You've seen something before. But for the congregation of Israel, this was a literal instance of *deja vu*.

[21 : 19] They had been here 40 years earlier. Because 40 years earlier, when Moses was their leader, and Joshua was still a warrior, he was in his youth.

Moses, he had led the people of Israel. He had led them out of Egypt after the Passover. He had led them through the Red Sea, and they were going on towards the Promised Land. In fact, Moses brought the whole congregation of Israel right to this point, to the banks of the River Jordan. But back then, the banks hadn't burst. It wasn't harvest time. The river wasn't overflowing. It wasn't even overwhelming them. In fact, Moses, just to make sure everything was okay in the Promised Land, he sent in 12 spies to spy out the Promised Land.

Two of those spies, one was Joshua, who's now the leader of the people here. The other was Caleb. And both Joshua and Caleb, they both came back with this positive report saying to the people, let's go.

Let's cross the Jordan. Let's go and get the land that the Lord has promised to his people. Let's go and receive this land flowing with milk and honey. Let's go. But as you know, there were another 10 spies.

[22 : 36] And the people, well, they went with the majority. Because those 10 spies, they didn't give the positive report. They gave this pessimistic report to the people. A report that doubted God's promises and even disregarded God's servant.

And the people, they were so overwhelmed at the obstacle of overcoming the land that they lost sight. They lost sight of what was right in front of them, there for the taking.

They lost sight of all the benefits and all the blessings that the Lord had promised in the Promised Land. And instead of taking that next step, they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

They spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness when they should have just taken the next step.

And now 40 years later, here we are in Joshua chapter 3.

Moses is gone. He's buried. And Joshua is the leader. And as a leader, Joshua has been with this congregation for quite a while.

[23 : 39] And by now, as their leader, he knows them pretty well. He knows their fears. He knows their faults. He knows where they lack in faith.

But Joshua, the Savior, he's on their side. Which is why they need to take the next step. They need to step forward. They need to step out in faith.

They need to step out in faith. They can't stand still any longer. They can't stay where they are.

They can't sit. No, no, they need to step out in faith.

You know, it's always good to have information. But it's application that's so important. And I can't help but see the application here.

Because you know, for some of you, I've been here not as long as Joshua was with the congregation of Israel. But I've been here long enough and I know you well enough by now to know that you've been coming to church.

[24 : 48] Some of you have been coming to church for the length of a wilderness journey. Maybe some of you have been coming to church for more than 40 years and more. And maybe like it was for the congregation of Israel, maybe in your youth you were confronted by the gospel.

Maybe in your youth you heard a sermon that really spoke to you and challenged you to take the next step where you knew that you needed to come to Christ. You knew that you needed to confess Jesus as Lord.

You knew that you needed to commit your life to Jesus Christ there and then. You knew that you needed to come out to the midweek meeting and maybe even profess your faith publicly.

But back then you hesitated. You held back and you held onto your worldly securities.

And because you didn't take that step for 40 years maybe not even 40 years you've been wandering around in the wilderness of this world.

[25 : 58] And sometimes like it was and like it is for little Matthew at home you're comfortable.

You're content. You're happy to sit here every Sunday morning and just stay where you are.

You're happy to watch others take that step before you. Maybe even point at others who have taken that step. Because well they're not as good a Christian as you would be if you take that step. But you don't profess to be something that you're not. And yet the profession of a Christian and I think we need to get this right. The profession of a Christian is not a profession of perfection. The profession of a Christian is that you're a miserable sinner saved by a wonderful Savior. Saved by grace. Your profession is that you're a saved sinner by God's goodness and God's grace. But maybe that's not what concerns you at all.

[27 : 03] Maybe what concerns you is that you didn't come when you should have. You didn't come when you should have. You knew the Lord was speaking to you.

You knew the Lord was challenging you. You knew the Word was almost speaking so powerfully and so directly that it couldn't be speaking to anybody but you. And maybe you think to yourself, well, I wish I'd come then.

I wish I'd taken that step then. I wish I'd come then. But now I feel I'm too late. I'm getting too old. I'm too far gone. I've done things in my life that, well, the Lord will never forgive me for that. So I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy enough to come. I'm not fit enough.

I'm not committed enough. I don't know enough. All these excuses. And you know, I've been here long enough to hear them all. And that's all they are.

[28 : 02] Excuses. But you know, my friend, God's Word comes to our congregation today just like it came to the congregation of Israel so long ago. And it comes with this call, this command to come and take the next step.

Joshua said to the people of Israel, come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. And this is what the Israelites were told. This is what the congregation were told.

That they were told that the priests, they're going to lead the people towards the river Jordan and they're going to lead them into the promised land. And that as soon as their foot steps into the fast-flowing river Jordan, the waters will part and they'll do exactly the same as they did at the Red Sea.

The waters will part and the congregation will walk through on dry ground. But all you have to do, says Joshua, is take that step of faith and follow them.

Take the step of faith and follow them. Now I don't know about you, but is that not one of the clearest pictures and pointers to what Jesus says to us in the gospel?

[29 : 11] Take the step of faith and follow me. Take the step of faith and follow me. Because when you take the step of faith, when you take the next step, you'll receive all the blessings and all the benefits of salvation.

You'll be brought out of the wilderness and you'll be brought into the promised land. You'll be brought out of sin into salvation, out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of the dungeon of slavery, where you have spent so many years of your life into liberty and freedom in Christ. And you know, my friend, Jesus is saying to you this morning, take that step and follow me. Take the step of faith and follow me. And you might be thinking to yourself, well, Myrdo, that's all very good and well, Myrdo.

It's not as easy as you think. It's not that easy. You read the passage again. It wasn't easy for the congregation of Israel either.

In fact, I would say you have it easier than they did. because for many of you, you've been sitting in church for years listening to sermons.

[30 : 30] Some of you have attended Christianity Explored, some more than once. Some of you have attended Discipleship Explored. Some of you have attended Bible studies. You've had Christian influences all around you all your life.

And they've all said the same thing. The same thing Jesus is saying to you today. Take that step of faith and follow me. Take the step of faith and follow me.

And you know, if the Lord is working in your life, you actually need to physically move. You can't just sit.

You have to move. Just like if the Lord gives you a desire to be in church like you're here this morning, you can't say, well, I've got a desire and then stay at home. You have to physically come to church.

And the same is true for when it comes to making a confession. You have to physically open your mouth and say, I love the Lord. I want to follow Him.

[31 : 36] I want to serve Him. You have to physically come out midweek. You have to physically come to the Lord's table. You have to physically move. You have to physically take the step of faith, as Jesus says, and follow me.

Because if the Lord is working in your heart and in your life, you have to respond in obedience to Him. And you know, what are you waiting for? You know, I've been here long enough to ask this question.

What are you looking for? What are you longing for? If it's a voice, if it's a voice from heaven or a verse from the Bible to say that you're a Christian, to say that you're one of the Lords, then you're not going to get it.

You're not going to get it. Because God has already spoken to you. He's already spoken to you, probably more than once, and I can say to you today, He's speaking to you right now.

From His Word, every time this Bible is opened, God is speaking. That's why every time we read the Bible in church, before I even read, I always say, let us hear the Word of God.

[32 : 47] God is speaking to you. He's already spoken to you more times than you could probably count. So is it not about time that you took Him at His Word and you took the next step?

Take the next step. Now time has gone, but with this I'll conclude. I love listening to Alistair Begg. He's a Scottish preacher and pastor in America.

But this is what he says. There are times in our Christian life when we cannot see beyond the next step and we have to trust God. There are times in our Christian life when we cannot see beyond the next step and we have to trust God.

We were talking in the car yesterday about the fog and Alison was talking about when she became a Christian. She was told at camp a long time ago that sometimes we can feel like we're in fog and we don't know where the Lord is.

We don't know what's in front of us. But the amazing thing is even in fog, as we all saw it yesterday, the sun is still in the sky even though we can't see it.

[34 : 08] And sometimes our life is like that too. Sometimes we're in fog. The Lord is still there. The Lord is always there. And that's what Alistair Begg is telling us. There are times in our Christian life when we cannot see beyond the next step but we have to trust God.

My friend, that's what you have to do. You have to trust God and take the next step of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. Because, you know, I assure you, when you take the step, this is when the burden will roll off you.

The burden of sin that weighs you down. It's then that you're given this assurance of salvation when you take the step. It's when you take the step that you have peace in your heart.

It's when you take the step that you then realize, yes, I'm a child of God and I have received all the blessings and benefits of salvation and they're all mine.

Not because of anything I've ever done but they're all because of what Jesus has done for me.

Take the next step. My friend, what are you waiting for?

[35 : 20] It's all right in front of you. So take the next step towards Him and Him alone. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks that every time we come to the Bible, God is speaking.

And Lord, help us, we pray, to listen. To listen to what God the Lord will speak knowing that to His folk He'll speak peace. Speak peace to our souls today, we pray.

enable us and even encourage us to take that step to realize that we are called to live lives of obedience and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Lord, speak to us and we ask. Bless Thy truth to us, we pray, that we truly find lodgment in our heart. O go before us and we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake.

[36 : 20] Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. We're going to sing the words of Psalm 18.

Psalm 18, it's in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 18, in the Scottish Psalter and it's at verse 31 down to the verse Mark 36.

It's on page 221 of the Blue Psalm book. Who but the Lord is God, but He who is a rock and stay.

Tis God that guardeth me with strength and perfect makes His way.

He made my feet swift as the hinds, set me on my high places. Mine hands to war He taught, mine arms break bows of steel and pieces.

And then down to verse 36, He says there, And in my way my steps thou hast enlarged under me that I go safely and my feet are kept from sliding free.

[37 : 36] So we'll sing these verses of Psalm 18 from verse 31 down to the verse Mark 36 and we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise. Who but the Lord is God but He Who is a rock and stay this God that girdeth me with strength and perfect makes my way.

He made my feet swift as the high set me on my high places.

Mine hands to war He taught, mine arms break bows of steel in pieces.

The shield of thy salvation Thou didst on me bestow Thy right hand held me upon great Thy kindness make me grow And if I wave my steps of past then march the love of God and my feet are kept from sliding free.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.