

JOSHUA 3:7-17 & REVELATION 7:9-17

THOSE OF YOU WHO REMEMBER THE COMEDY SHOW “ALL IN THE FAMILY”, WILL UNDOUBTED ALSO KNOW THAT ARCHIE BUNKER HAD A KNACK FOR SAYING OUTRAGEOUS THINGS.

HOWEVER, ONE OF HIS STATEMENTS IS NOT ONLY DESCRIPTIVE OF WHAT SOME PEOPLE THINK, BUT ALSO IS NOT AS OFFENSIVE AS MOST OF HIS WORDS.

ON THE ISSUE OF FAITH, ARCHIE SAID: “FAITH IS BELIEVING SOMETHING NO BODY IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD BELIEVE.”

THIS IS NOT FAR FROM THE REALITY OF HOW THE WORLD VIEWS THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD, AND HAVE FAITH IN THE PROMISE OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST.

YET, IT IS PROBABLY SAFE TO SAY THAT MANY, IF NOT MOST CHRISTIANS, HAVE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER APPROACHED GOD WITH AN ATTITUDE OF SEEKING PROOF FROM GOD, BEFORE WE CLING TO FAITH.

THE LORD GOD, HOWEVER, OFTEN ASKS US TO FIRST TRUST HIM EVEN WHEN IT MAKES NO SENSE, AND THEN WE WILL SEE GOD’S ACTION, AND THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS PROMISES.

IN OTHER WORDS, GOD CALLS US TO HAVE FAITH THAT WE SOMETIMES MUST WAIT FOR GOD’S TIMING, AND OTHER TIMES MUST BE OPEN TO THE LORD DOING A NEW THING.

SUCH FAITH ALSO INVOLVES A CHOICE ON OUR PART TO BELIEVE OR NOT, TO FOLLOW OR NOT. YES, GOD OFTEN CALLS US TO TAKE A STEP OF FAITH-AND THEN HE WILL SHOW US AND LEAD US.

WHILE FAITH OF THIS SORT MAY COME EASY TO SOME PEOPLE, TO OTHERS IT FEELS LIKE AN UP HILL STRUGGLE WITH A FIFTY POUND OR MORE, WEIGHT ON THEIR BACK.

AND THEN THERE ARE THOSE FOR WHOM FAITH, FOR THE MOST PART- IS SOMETHING THAT NEITHER IS SURPRISINGLY EASY, NOR FRUSTRATINGLY HARD.

HOWEVER, NO MATTER HOW HARD OR EASY DOING SO IS THE LORD AND CONTINUES TO CALL US TO STEP OUT IN FAITH.

WE CAN LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR EXAMPLES OF THE NEED TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP-TRUSTING IN GOD’S PROMISES, AS WELL AS REMEMBERING HIS PAST ACTIONS ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE.

TODAY’S OLD TESTAMENT READING IS ONE EXAMPLE. AND YET THE STORY OF THE ISRAELITES CROSSING THE JORDAN RIVER, IS A STORY MANY CHRISTIANS MAY FIND DIFFICULT TO RELATE TO.

YOU SEE THEIR EXPERIENCE IS SO MUCH MORE ALIEN TO OUR OWN, WE ARE LESS LIKELY TO FIND MUCH PERSONAL VALUE IN THE READING FROM JOSHUA.

AND YET SUCH AN ASSUMPTION WOULD BE A MISTAKE. THERE ACTUALLY IS A LESSON WE CAN LEARN FOR OUR OWN FAITH JOURNEY FROM THE ISRAELITE’S EXPERIENCE.

FIRST, IMAGINE A RIVER DURING THE SPRING WHEN THERE HAS BEEN A LOT RAIN, CAUSING THE WATER TO RISE HIGH AND FLOW SWIFTLY.

WE KNOW THAT IT IS DANGEROUS TO VENTURE INTO THE WATER, EVEN WITH A BOAT, LET ALONE TO TRY TO CROSS WITHOUT ONE.

NOW IMAGINE GOD TELLING YOU TO DO JUST THAT, TO STEP INTO THE RIVER-WITHOUT A LIFE PRESERVER, OR EVEN THE BENEFIT OF A FIRE DEPARTMENT’S WATER RESCUE TEAM.

DO YOU LISTEN TO GOD’S THE PROMISE THAT ONCE YOUR FOOT TOUCHES THE WATER-THE FLOW ABOVE YOU WILL STOP AND YOU WILL CROSS IN SAFETY?

LET’S BE HONEST, IT IS UNLIKELY ANY OF US WOULD OBEY-AT LEAST NOT WITHOUT A GREAT DEAL MORE ASSURANCE FROM GOD.

NOW THINK ABOUT THE ISRAELITES-WHO HAVE COME TO THE MOMENT WHEN GOD’S PROMISE OF A LAND OF THEIR OWN IS ABOUT TO BE FULFILLED.

BUT THE JOURNEY WILL NOT BE EASY- THERE ARE MANY ROADBLOCKS YET TO BE OVERCOME.

THE FIRST OF WHICH WAS CROSSING THE JORDAN RIVER DURING THE SPRING FLOODS, FOR IT WAS WIDER, DEEPER, AND SWIFTER THAN ANY RIVER MOST OF THEM HAD EVER SEEN.

IN FACT IT WAS SO DANGEROUS DURING THOSE TIMES, THAT THE FORDS WERE RENDERED USELESS-BECAUSE THE RIVER BECAME TOO HIGH AND TOO POWERFUL TO SAFELY CROSS AT THE USUAL PLACES.

THE ISRAELITES HAD SEVERAL OTHER ISSUES AS WELL TO DEAL WITH CONCERNING THE CROSSING.

ONE OF WHICH WAS THE FACT, THE GENERATION WHO COMPRISED MOST OF THOSE WHO WOULD CROSS, HAD NOT BEEN BORN INTO SLAVERY, BUT FREEDOM.

THIS MEANT THEY DID NOT HAVE THE BENEFIT OF HAVING WALKED ACROSS THE DRY BOTTOM OF THE RED SEA.

ALSO, SINCE THEY GREW UP IN THE WILDERNESS-THEY SURELY WOULD NOT HAVE KNOWN HOW TO SWIM.

THEN THERE WAS THE “LITTLE” PROBLEM OF A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP- MOSES WAS DEAD, AND JOSHUA WAS IN CHARGE.

IN SHORT, ISRAEL WAS A LOT LIKE A TEAM WITH A NEW AND UNTRIED QUARTERBACK, OR A RELIEF PITCHER IN A MUST WIN GAME.

THEY HAD TO TRUST JOSHUA’S WORD GOD HAD PROMISED TO GET THEM SAFELY TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN -IF THEY FOLLOWED THE PRIESTS WHO HAD TO STEP INTO THE RAGING WATER.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE BEEN EITHER OF THE TWO PRIESTS WHO WERE IN FRONT OF THE ARK?

THE VISIBLE SIGN OF PRESENCE OF GOD, FOUND IN THE ARK WAS BEHIND THEM.

THIS MEANS THEY HAD TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP INTO THE RIVER, WITH NOTHING TO LOOK AT BUT THE CHURNING WATERS, AND THE SHORE BEYOND.

YET IF THEY DID NOT DEPEND ON GOD TO PROTECT THEM, NO ONE WAS GOING TO MOVE FORWARD TO TAKE HOLD OF THE LAND THEY COULD SEE.

WHAT A RESPONSIBILITY AND A CHALLENGE, AND A GREAT ACT OF FAITH ON THEIR PART TO ENTER THE WATER.

AND TO TOP IT OFF, IMAGINE BEING CALLED TO STEP OUT IN FAITH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NEW GUY-RATHER THAN THE TRIED AND TRUE LEADERSHIP OF MOSES?

THE FAITH OF THOSE TWO LEAD MEN WAS SURELY STRONG-AS WAS STRONG THEIR DESIRE TO OBEY THE VOICE OF THE LORD, AND FOLLOW JOSHUA AS THEIR LEADER.

NOW IT MAY COMFORT YOU TO KNOW IT IS UNLIKELY GOD WILL TEST OUR FAITH AND TRUST IN HIM- BY COMMANDING ANY OF US TO STEP INTO A RAGING RIVER.

HOWEVER- THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE WILL BE FREE FROM CHALLENGES JUST AS GREAT, AND PERHAPS AT TIMES AS TREACHEROUS.

THIS IS LESSON OF THE TEXT FOR OUR OWN LIVES. AFTER ALL, FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM DISEASE, INJURY, LOSS, OR OTHER TYPE OF SUFFERING.

AND THEN THERE ARE THE DISASTERS AND CHALLENGES OF OUR OWN MAKING.

CONSEQUENTLY, WE OFTEN MUST MAKE DECISIONS FOR OURSELVES OR FOR A LOVED ONE- THAT ARE AS HARD AS CROSSING THE JORDAN, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

LISTEN TO THIS REFLECTION, BY ANOTHER PREACHER, ON THE TEXT, AND HOW IT CAN BE APPLIED TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

“IT IS A STORY OF HOW GOD ACTS THROUGH THE TRUST OF THE PEOPLE, OF WHAT GOD DOES WHEN WE AFFIRM HIS PRESENCE AND TRUST IN HIS WORD....”

BUT OF COURSE THIS AFFIRMATION AND TRUST CAN BE A CHALLENGE, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE ARE ASKED TO GO FIRST AND LEAD OTHERS.

AND YET, IN ORDER FOR US TO PASS TO THE OTHER SIDE, IN ORDER TO TAKE HOLD OF GOD'S PROMISES, WE MUST FIRST STEP INTO THE WATER.

FURTHERMORE, WE MUST DO SO TRUSTING WE WILL END UP WHERE GOD WANTS US TO-WHETHER OR NOT IT IS THE PLACE WE HAD IN MIND.

TODAY'S READING FROM JOSHUA, TEACHES GOD WILL ASSIST US TO OVERCOME ANY OBSTACLES THAT MAY STAND IN THE WAY OF HIS PLANS FOR US, WHEN WE ARE WILLING TO TRUST HIM.

THUS, THE JORDAN RIVER HAS BECOME A METAPHOR IN CHRISTIANITY FOR THE CHALLENGES WE FACE IN LIFE THAT CALL US TO HAVE FAITH IN THE LORD.

THE WORDS OF ONE VERSE OF THE HYMN- "HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION", ILLUSTRATES THIS POINT. IN IT GOD SAYS:

"WHEN THROUGH THE DEEP WATERS I CALL THEE TO GO, THE RIVERS OF SORROW SHALL NOT OVERFLOW; FOR I WILL BE NEAR THEE, THY TROUBLES TO BLESS. AND SANCTIFY TO THEE THY DEEPEST DISTRESS."

IT SOUNDS GREAT-DOESN'T IT? – THAT IS UNTIL ONE REALLY THINKS ABOUT WHAT IS ACTUALLY BEING SAID.

NOTICE--THE HYMN DOES NOT PROMISE CHRISTIANS WILL BE FREE FROM SORROW, ONLY SAVED FROM DROWNING IN IT.

NOR ARE WE ASSURED OF AVOIDING TROUBLE, BUT RATHER THAT GOD WILL BRING SOMETHING GOOD OUT OF IT.

FINALLY, WE ARE NOT GIVEN IMMUNITY FROM DEEP DISTRESS, BUT RATHER ARE TOLD GOD WILL BRING US THROUGH IT, IN A WAY THAT WILL BE TO OUR BENEFIT.

IN OTHER WORDS- LIKE JOSHUA AND THE ISRAELITES, WE TOO ARE CALLED STEP OUT IN FAITH, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

THERE ARE TIMES DOING SO IS FAIRLY EASY, BUT WE MUST BE AWARE, AND THUS BE PREPARED THAT OTHER TIMES THAT FIRST SMALL STEP WILL BE THE HARDEST THING WE'VE EVER HAD TO DO.

A DEVOTIONAL FROM THAT CENTURY HAD THIS TO SAY ABOUT THE CROSSING THE JORDAN:

"...IF YOU EVER ARE TO ENTER THIS GLORIOUS LAND, FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY, YOU MUST SOONER OR LATER STEP INTO THE BRIMMING WATERS, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER PATH...."

THUS THE QUESTION THE BIBLE READING ASKS EACH ONE OF US TODAY IS: ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE THAT STEP OF FAITH?

WHAT EVER OUR PERSONAL JORDAN RIVER MAY BE, WHETHER WE ARE BEING CALLED TO CROSS IT RIGHT NOW, OR AT A FUTURE DATE, MAY WE TRUST IN THE LORD'S PROMISE TO GO WITH US, AND TO GET US TO THE OTHER SIDE.

BUT THERE IS YET ANOTHER WAY TO VIEW CROSSING THE JORDAN, AND THIS HAS BEEN EXPRESSED IN MANY SONGS LIKE:

"I LOOKED OVER JORDAN, AND WHAT DID I SEE COMING FOR TO CARRY ME HOME? A BAND OF ANGELS COMING AFTER ME, COMING FOR TO CARRY ME HOME."

A VERSE IN AN OLD WELSH HYMN PUT IT THIS WAY: "WHEN I TREAD THE VERGE OF JORDAN, BID MY ANXIOUS FEARS SUBSIDE. DEATH OF DEATH AND HELL'S DESTRUCTION, LAND ME SAFE ON CANAAN'S SIDE."

THE PASSAGE FROM REVELATION DRAWS OUR ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE JORDAN AND LANDED ON HEAVEN'S SHORES.

IT SPEAKS ABOUT THE SAINTS, WHO ARE BASKING IN THE GLORY OF GOD, AND WORSHIPPING IN PERSON BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN.

IN THIS PASSAGE, THESE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIANS HAVE NOT OBTAINED THEIR PLACE AMONG THE REDEEMED OR BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, BY THEIR OWN MERITS.

IT WAS NOT THE STRENGTH OR ENDURANCE OF FAITH, NOR ANY DEEDS OF WONDER OR EVEN MIRACLES THEY MIGHT HAVE DONE THAT BROUGHT THEM THERE, INSTEAD IT WAS GOD'S ACTION ON THEIR BEHALF.

THE PROTESTANT UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD- "SAINT", IS TAKEN FROM THE BIBLE'S USE OF IT.

"SAINT" APPEARS OVER 60 TIMES IN SCRIPTURE, AND IN EACH CASE IT REFERS TO ALL BELIEVERS.

CONSEQUENTLY, SAINTS ARE NOT ONLY SPECIAL CHRISTIANS, OR THOSE WHO HAVE MORE POWERFUL GIFTS FROM GOD THAN THE REST OF US.

THEY INCLUDE, ALL CHRISTIANS, THAT IS EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN SAVED THROUGH CHRIST ARE SAINTS.

OF COURSE IT IS SAFE TO SAY NONE OF US WOULD BE SO PRESUMPTUOUS TO ACTUALLY PUT THAT TITLE BEFORE OUR NAMES.

DOING SO, AFTER ALL, WOULD BE MORE OF A BURDEN THAN A BLESSING.

EVEN SO, ALL CHRISTIANS LIVING IN THE WORLD AND LIVING IN HEAVEN ARE TECHNICALLY, SAINTS.

WE ARE SO, BECAUSE WE HAVE WASHED OUR ROBES IN THE BLOOD OF JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.

NOW THE PICTURE THE PHRASE "WASHED IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB" BRINGS TO MIND IS NOT A PLEASANT ONE.

THAT IS UNTIL WE REMEMBER THAT BLOOD IN THE BIBLE IS A METAPHOR FOR LIFE.

CONSEQUENTLY THE MEANING OF THE PHRASE IS-WE HAVE WASHED IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRIST.

WE ARE CLEANSED OF SIN BY JESUS, WHO MAKES US WORTHY TO STAND IN HIS PRESENCE, AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD ON HIS THRONE.

THUS THE PICTURE OF WHITE-ROBED SAINTS FROM ALL NATIONS, RACES, TRIBES, LANGUAGES CONVEYS A MESSAGE OF VICTORY FROM SIN AND DEATH, FOR US, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE JORDAN BEFORE US.

THEY SING THE SONG OF THE REDEEMED, WHICH EMPHASIZES THE SOURCE OF THEIR BLESSED STATE: "SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD WHO IS SEATED ON THE THRONE AND TO THE LAMB."

THIS IS A SONG ALL CHRISTIANS CAN SING, IF ONLY IN OUR HEARTS, BECAUSE WE TOO HAVE RECEIVED GOD'S PROMISED SALVATION.

AND SO AS WE REMEMBER THIS ALL SAINTS DAY, ALL THOSE WE KNOW AND THOSE WE DO NOT KNOW, WHO HAVE MADE THE FINAL CROSSING OVER THE JORDAN, LET US BE THANKFUL FOR THEM.

LET US ALSO BE THANKFUL THAT IN LIFE AND IN DEATH, WE BELONG TO GOD AND TO THE LAMB, FROM WHOM OUR SALVATION COMES. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JOSHUA 3:7-17 & REVELATION 7:9-17

TODAY'S OLD TESTAMENT READING IS ONE EXAMPLE OF STEPPING OUT IN FAITH. THINK ABOUT THE ISRAELITES-WHO HAVE COME TO THE MOMENT WHEN GOD'S PROMISE OF A LAND OF THEIR OWN IS ABOUT TO BE FULFILLED.

BUT THE JOURNEY WILL NOT BE EASY- THERE ARE MANY ROADBLOCKS YET TO BE OVERCOME. THE FIRST OF WHICH WAS CROSSING THE JORDAN RIVER DURING THE SPRING FLOODS, FOR IT WAS WIDER, DEEPER, AND SWIFTER THAN ANY RIVER MOST OF THEM HAD EVER SEEN.

THEY HAD TO TRUST JOSHUA'S WORD GOD HAD PROMISED TO GET THEM SAFELY TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN -IF THEY FOLLOWED THE PRIESTS WHO HAD TO STEP INTO THE RAGING WATER. THIS MEANS THE PRIESTS HAD TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP INTO THE RIVER, WITH NOTHING TO LOOK AT BUT THE CHURNING WATERS, AND THE SHORE BEYOND.

YET IF THEY DID NOT DEPEND ON GOD TO PROTECT THEM, NO ONE WAS GOING TO MOVE FORWARD TO TAKE HOLD OF THE LAND THEY COULD SEE. WHAT A RESPONSIBILITY AND A CHALLENGE, AND A GREAT ACT OF FAITH ON THEIR PART TO ENTER THE WATER.

NOW IT MAY COMFORT YOU TO KNOW IT IS UNLIKELY GOD WILL TEST OUR FAITH AND TRUST IN HIM- BY COMMANDING ANY OF US TO STEP INTO A RAGING RIVER. HOWEVER- THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE WILL BE FREE FROM CHALLENGES JUST AS GREAT, AND PERHAPS AT TIMES AS TREACHEROUS.

THIS IS LESSON OF THE TEXT FOR OUR OWN LIVES. AFTER ALL, FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM DISEASE, INJURY, LOSS, OR OTHER TYPE OF SUFFERING.

AND THEN THERE ARE THE DISASTERS AND CHALLENGES OF OUR OWN MAKING. CONSEQUENTLY, WE OFTEN MUST MAKE DECISIONS FOR OURSELVES OR FOR A LOVED ONE- THAT ARE AS HARD AS CROSSING THE JORDAN, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

LISTEN TO THIS REFLECTION, BY ANOTHER PREACHER, ON THE TEXT, AND HOW IT CAN BE APPLIED TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

“IT IS A STORY OF HOW GOD ACTS THROUGH THE TRUST OF THE PEOPLE, OF WHAT GOD DOES WHEN WE AFFIRM HIS PRESENCE AND TRUST IN HIS WORD....”

TODAY'S READING FROM JOSHUA, TEACHES GOD WILL ASSIST US TO OVERCOME ANY OBSTACLES THAT MAY STAND IN THE WAY OF HIS PLANS FOR US, WHEN WE ARE WILLING TO TRUST HIM. THUS, THE JORDAN RIVER HAS BECOME A METAPHOR IN CHRISTIANITY FOR THE CHALLENGES WE FACE IN LIFE THAT CALL US TO HAVE FAITH IN THE LORD.

THE WORDS OF ONE VERSE OF THE HYMN- “HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION”, ILLUSTRATES THIS POINT. IN IT GOD SAYS: “WHEN THROUGH THE DEEP WATERS I CALL THEE TO GO, THE RIVERS OF SORROW SHALL NOT OVERFLOW; FOR I WILL BE NEAR THEE, THY TROUBLES TO BLESS. AND SANCTIFY TO THEE THY DEEPEST DISTRESS.”

IT SOUNDS GREAT-DOESN'T IT? – THAT IS UNTIL ONE REALLY THINKS ABOUT WHAT IS ACTUALLY BEING SAID. NOTICE--THE HYMN DOES NOT PROMISE CHRISTIANS WILL BE FREE FROM SORROW, ONLY SAVED FROM DROWNING IN IT. NOR ARE WE ASSURED OF AVOIDING TROUBLE, BUT RATHER THAT GOD WILL BRING SOMETHING GOOD OUT OF IT.

FINALLY, WE ARE NOT GIVEN IMMUNITY FROM DEEP DISTRESS, BUT RATHER ARE TOLD GOD WILL BRING US THROUGH IT, IN A WAY THAT WILL BE TO OUR BENEFIT. IN OTHER WORDS- LIKE JOSHUA AND THE ISRAELITES, WE TOO ARE CALLED STEP OUT IN FAITH, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

BUT THERE IS YET ANOTHER WAY TO VIEW CROSSING THE JORDAN. THE PASSAGE FROM REVELATION DRAWS OUR ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE JORDAN AND LANDED ON HEAVEN'S SHORES. ALL CHRISTIANS LIVING IN THE WORLD AND LIVING IN HEAVEN ARE TECHNICALLY, SAINTS.

WE ARE SO, BECAUSE WE HAVE WASHED OUR ROBES IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB; MEANING - WE HAVE WASHED IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRIST. THUS THE PICTURE OF WHITE-ROBE SAINTS FROM ALL NATIONS, RACES, TRIBES, LANGUAGES CONVEYS A MESSAGE OF VICTORY FROM SIN AND DEATH, FOR US, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE JORDAN BEFORE US.

