

## Sermon 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Introduction:** The following letter was found in a baking powder can wired to the handle of an old pump that offered the only hope of drinking water on a very long and seldom-used trail across the Amargosa Desert in America:

"This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and cork end up. There's enough water in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about one fourth and let her soak to wet the leather washer. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You'll git water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you git watered up, fill the bottle and put it back like you found it for the next feller." - Desert Pete

"P.S. Don't go drinking up the water first. Prime the pump with it and you'll get all you can hold."

Last week we looked at God calling and preparing Joshua and the Israelite nation to cross the Jordan and take the land He had promised to them through Abraham. The sermon could have been titled "Look to God and let go of the side of the pool". We looked at the fact fear often, if not always, confronts us when God calls to take a step of faith for Him. That is the same fear that both Joshua and Israelite nation would have felt as they approached the river Jordan and prepared to enter the Promised Land. God said to them be strong and courageous because I am always faithful, and you can trust Me to do what I say. God said be strong and courageous and obey the commandments I have given you through Moses, and this would make you wise. Possibly most importantly God said be strong and courageous because I Myself will be with you as you cross the Jordan and throughout what is to come, I will never leave you or forsake you. Trusting God's faithfulness, God's word and God's abiding presence was God's solution for overcoming the fear that gripped Joshua and the Israelite nation and for us when confronted with that same fear when God asks us to do something for Him. Trusting God is the starting point to obeying God. After all why

would you obey God if he didn't keep his word; why would you trust God if what he told you wasn't true and didn't work; why would you obey God if he was liable to run off and abandon you at any moment?

This morning we are going to briefly look at the other part of what Joshua and the Israelites had to do to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land, and that is "obey". This probably the hardest thing God asks us to do, to obey Him, it is where the rubber hits the road. It is in that moment of obedience that all you think you believe is tested. It is that moment of obedience when you surrender to God and stop trusting in yourself and start truly trusting in Him. Obedience to God is hard because it always entails us stopping looking to our own strengths or abilities and to start looking to God's strength and abilities. The Israelite nation knew that taking the promised land was a task beyond them, they couldn't achieve it by their own strengths or abilities, that is why they feared. They knew that take the promised Land it required God to show up and do the heavy lifting. You see to obey God you need to first trust God.

Taking the Promised land with all it's Giants is a pretty big task to contemplate and you could understand the Israelite nations fears. Yet even in small everyday tasks we tend fear when God asks us to trust and obey Him. I wonder if you like me despair at your lack of obedience to God's call on your life. Don't despair, be strong and be courageous for our passage this morning shows us how the Israelite nation moved from being ready to cross the Jordan, trusting God, to actually crossing the Jordan, obeying God. The passage give us three steps we can take to obey God.

**We obey by consecrating ourselves.** Verse 5 *"Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."*

Consecrate means to dedicate or to set aside for God's use. For the Israelite nation consecrating themselves meant ritual washing of their clothes and themselves, avoiding contact with anything unclean or undertaking any unclean activity and abstaining from intercourse! These were all outward actions of obedience in making themselves ceremonially clean and fit for God's service.

For us twenty first Christians consecration is not about us making ourselves clean and fit for God's service. God has already made us clean, your are a new creation and He

fitted us for His service through His word **2 Timothy 3: 17** *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the child of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.”* For us Twenty first Christians consecration is a matter of making a decision to place God’s desires before our own. We need to simply decide to follow God desires and not our own desires. Yes, I did use the word simply to describe the decision to say, “not my will but yours be done”. Yes, I know it feels like a hard decision to make, but it is a decision that God has given you the power and freedom to make. The reason that the account of Jesus struggles with obeying God will for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane is so powerful is because we can all empathise with Jesus’s desire to make His own decisions and not follow God’s will for Him. You cannot obey God if you are choosing to follow your own needs, wants and desires. The first step in crossing the Jordan for the Israelite people was deciding to set aside their own desires and to set themselves to follow God’s desires for them. Jesus found the strength to obey God’s will in a place of prayer and example we should also follow.

**We obey by following God.** Verse 11 *“See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.”*

This maybe self-evident to you but we can only obey God when we follow God. Imagine if you will that Israelites had been strong and courageous and had consecrated themselves and then said, “Right were going into the Promised Land, but I don’t really fancy waiting around here for the priests to get themselves sorted out. Anyway, I think God hasn’t chosen the best place to cross the river. I think we should just get on with it and move upriver a bit where I can see a better crossing point, come on lads lets go.” Yes, they would have been trying to following God’s will and purpose, but they were not being obedient. Obedience involves following God. The Priests are told to carry the Ark before the people, the Ark that included the Mercy seat, the very throne of God where God’s presence had resided during the forty long years of wandering in the desert. Joshua was literally telling the Israelite nation to follow God across the Jordan. I am sure that if our imaginary Israelites had wandered of to cross the Jordan upriver, they would have come to a sticky end, because they were relying on themselves and not following and relying on God.

Obedience means walking in God's footprints. This means for us twenty first century Christians that we have to take time to seek God. We need to take time to seek Him both personally and corporately. We need to take time in prayer to see where God's footprints are leading in given situation and then choose to follow them. God's promise to us is that when we seek Him, we will find Him.

### **We obey by getting our feet wet**

Before God would part the waters of the Jordan a condition had to be met - a step of faith. "But as soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched its edge and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up in a mass . . ." (Joshua 3:15-16). Do you see the before principle? God promised that the Jordan would be dammed up but first the people had to step in the water whilst the water was still flowing. God was ready, willing, and able to perform an amazing miracle, a feat that would prove that he was the living God. But the miracle hinged on the people's obedience. They had to get their feet wet before God would act.

Isn't that just like God? He wants to do some amazing things, but before he does - we have to trust and obey Him. We are required to demonstrate our faith, by being obedient. Faith is risky business. Kierkegaard a Danish Philosopher wrote, "Without risk there is no faith." For faith to be faith, we venture out beyond our own abilities and resources. We take the step before God acts.

Often God provides no solution to our problems until we trust and obey him. While he wants to supernaturally intervene in the difficulties and challenges of our everyday lives, sometimes we have to first demonstrate faith by walking forward on the path of obedience. Compared to God's part, our part is miniscule but necessary. We don't have to do much, but we do have to do something, we have to take the first step.

### **Conclusion:**

Obedience is built on relationship with God and is ultimately reliant on God revealing His will and way to us.

We can trust God because he is faithful, His word is true and He will never leave us or forsake us. We can be obedient because we trust God. Obedience always requires a step of faith. What is that first step of faith for you? There are as many first steps as there are circumstances of life. Maybe the first step is to offer another forgiveness and reconciliation. Maybe your one step is to let go of anger or resentment. Maybe your life is unmanageable, and that first step is just one of twelve. Sometimes the first step is to simply be quiet, be still, and listen. Perhaps your first step is to let go of having to be right or in control. Maybe your first step means you no longer allow fear to dominate your life. Perhaps the first step for you is to risk intimacy and vulnerability. Maybe that first step is simply offering to pray for a friend or neighbour or work colleague.

I do not know what the first step of obedience is for you is, but I am certain God is challenging you to take a first step and be obedient to His will for your life.

We are going to sing a well-known hymn "Trust and Obey" as we do so I would invite you to use the time to talk to God, reflect on what he is saying to you this morning about taking that first step of obedient faith.