

Crossing the Jordan

(Joshua 3)

Introduction

What is faith? The Bible says, “It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.” (Hebrews 11:1 TLB) [Teacher, explain this in terms your class will understand.]

There was once a tight rope walker that stretched a tight rope over the top of Niagara Falls. He walked back and forth across the tight rope to everyone’s astonishment. Then he took a wheel barrow and pushed it back and forth across the tight rope over the raging waters below. When he got back, he asked the crowd if they had faith in his ability to walk the tight rope once more. They all said, “Yes!” They’d seen him go back and forth a couple of times and they were sure he could do it again. So, he asked if anyone from the crowd was willing to get into the wheel barrow. At first there was not a single person who was willing to get in the wheel barrow and allow the man to push him over the falls. Did these people have real faith? Finally, there was one man in the crowd that was willing to get into the wheel barrow. Now, this man’s faith was real, wasn’t it? He was willing to allow the tight rope walker to push him over to the other side and back again.

Having faith that pleases God means believing what God says and acting on it. That kind of faith brings God honor. Today we are going to find out if the children of Israel had real faith or not.

Opening Prayer

Father, to have faith in You is to know without a shadow of a doubt that You will always be there to take care of us, even when we find ourselves in a scary situation. Teach us this morning that we can rest in Your love and care. That we can choose to follow you by trusting and obeying You even when we are up against a hard situation. Help our faith to grow. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

It is impossible to please God without faith. (Hebrews 11:6a NLT)

Lesson

After traveling in the desert for 40 years with Moses as their leader, the Israelites were finally ready to go into the Promised Land. This wouldn’t be easy because there were hundreds of thousands of people, including young children and babies. And, they had to cross over a huge raging river to get there.

Joshua 3:1

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.

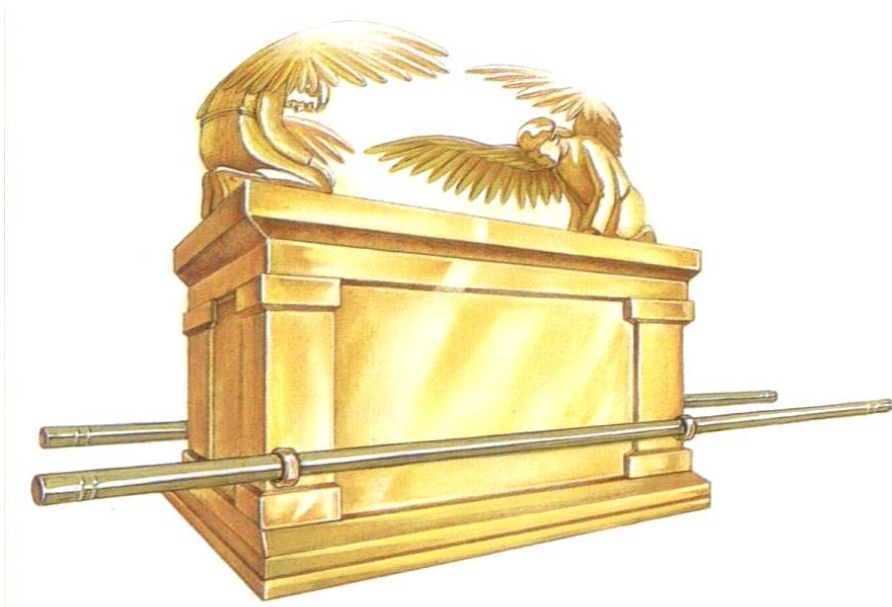
Joshua, the new leader of all these people, sent officers to tell the people to get ready to cross over the Jordan River.

Joshua 3:2-3

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.

Joshua tells the people not to rush ahead, but to follow the priests who will be carrying the ark of the covenant.

The ark of the covenant was Israel’s most sacred treasure. The ark was a gold-covered box with two angels facing each other on the lid. Inside the ark were the tablets of the Ten Commandments Moses received from God, a jar of manna (the bread God miraculously sent from heaven during the desert wanderings), and Aaron’s staff (the symbol of the high priest’s authority).



The ark of the covenant was a reminder of God's love and power. It helped the Israelites remember that God was with them and would take care of them. It would give them the faith to know that with God's help, everyone would cross that rushing river.

The big day the children of Israel had been waiting for had finally come. They were about to enter the Promised Land!

Joshua 3:6

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 priests picked up the ark of the covenant and started walking toward the river, just as Joshua told them to do. There was just one big problem! They had to get across the Jordan River which was running fast and deep! Then God spoke to Joshua...

Joshua 3:7-8

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.'"

There they were, standing on the banks of the mighty Jordan River, wondering how in the world they were going to get across. And God told Joshua, "Watch and see! I'm going to do a great miracle so that all Israel will know that I am with you just as I was with Moses." God was helping them to have faith in His great power and might!

The priests with the ark walked right to the edge of the rushing water. The current was dangerous! What would you have been thinking if you had been one of the priests? They must have thought that they might get swept away down the river!

Joshua encouraged the people to have faith and to trust and obey!

Joshua 3:13

The priests will carry the Ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.

And so it was...

Joshua 3:15-16

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, 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.

The town of Adam was several miles north of where the Israelites crossed the river! What do you think the people in the town of Adam thought when they saw the river stop in a heap?

The Israelites must have watched in amazement as the priests carried the ark into the middle of the dry riverbed. But they didn't watch for long! All the people, the entire nation of Israel, hurried around the priests and across the riverbed. Even though they moved as fast as they could, it took hours for all the hundreds of thousands of Israelites to cross the river! How might you have felt if you walked across the Jordan River with Joshua and all the Israelites?

Joshua 3:17

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.

The priests remained in the middle of the riverbed until everyone was safely across the river. The enormous crowd of Israelites stood on the other shore. They must have looked at each other in awe. Their feet weren't even muddy. All of them were safe and dry.

The Israelites must have remembered the story of the time their parents had escaped from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on dry land. God had taken care of their parents and He was taking care of them now, showing them that He was with them.

And now – wonder of wonders – they were in the Promised Land! What astonishing things God had done!

Now I want you to notice that God did not stop the waters *before* the priests stepped into the raging river. No! God waited for the priests to show their faith in God by stepping into the swift current. It says as soon as their feet dipped into the water, God stopped its flow. There are times in your life that God will not answer your prayers until you show your trust in Him. Sometimes you'll have to prove your faith in God's love and power by putting your trust in Him and stepping out in faith. If you don't, you may miss out on seeing God's promise to take care of you, even in tough situations. Unless the children of Israel had obeyed God, they would have been left with no way to cross the river and no idea of where to go next.

Into your life will come a Jordan-River experience — some big, overwhelming situation in life. Maybe it will be starting a new school and having to meet new friends. Maybe it will be going to the dentist or taking a test you don't feel prepared for. God wants you to trust Him and to step out in faith, knowing that He will use His power to help you!

The Israelites had followed God's instructions and all His promises to Joshua and to the people came true! Now the Israelites were ready to follow God and obey Him no matter what. They knew that God was with them just as He had been with Moses. They knew that God would help them do everything He commanded them to do.

Sometimes it seems that God only helped people and did miracles in Bible times. But God's care and love is for us, too! When we have problems, we can be sure that God will help us – through friends, parents or even Bible verses. So talk to God about your problems and trust Him to help you – just like He helped the Israelites. You can have faith in God's love and care for you.

Closing Prayer

Thank You, Lord, that You have promised to always be with us and to care for us with. Thank You that when we have problems or need help, You are always there to encourage us and to help us by demonstrating Your power and love for us. Help us to be brave and to step out in faith, even when we're having a Jordan-River experience. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

The ark of the covenant was a reminder to the Israelites that God was with them and would take care of them. It reminded them of God's love and power. What are some ways God has shown His love and power to you? (Sent Jesus to pay for our sins. Created the world.)

Answers our prayers. Gives us people who love us.) What are some objects that would remind you of God's love and power? (Cross. Ocean waves. Tall tree. Waterfall. The World.)

Have students draw pictures of things that remind them of God's love and power.

Game Center

Trust Walk

Set up a short obstacle course for children to go through, such as a chair to climb over, a table to climb under, a length of string to walk along, and so forth. Say: "The obstacles in our obstacle course remind us of the troubles or difficulties we sometimes have at school or at home. When you run into trouble, remember that God will listen when you pray to him and He will always love you and care for you. You can have faith in Him."

Or, use the following review questions in a discussion or game of your choice.

1. How did God show His love and power to the Israelites?
2. What do you think the Israelites might have said to praise God at the end of our story today?
3. How does God show His love and power to people today? (He forgives our sins and makes us part of His family when we believe in Him. He answers our prayers in the way that is best for us. He gives us what we need to live the way He wants us to.)
4. When is a time that a child your age might need help from a parent? A teacher? A friend? God? (Have to take a hard test. Get in a fight with a friend. Another child is being mean. Parents argue.) How do you think God might help a child in that situation? (Help to remember a Bible verse. Give an adult or friend to talk to

about the situation. Give an idea of what to do in the situation. Give courage.)

5. How has God helped you? What can you do to show that you are thankful for God's loving help?

Sword Drills

1. Read **Psalm 32:7-8**. How does the writer of this psalm describe God in verse 7? How does verse 8 say God helps us? Thank God for His promise of help in the Bible.
2. Read **Psalm 59:16**. Who is this verse written to? (God.) When does the writer of this psalm say God is his refuge? (In time of trouble). How does the writer of this psalm praise God? (Sings and tells others about what God has done.) What reasons does the writer give for praising God? (God helped him when he had problems, God is a fortress, or the One who makes the writer feel safe.) How did God help the Israelites in today's story? (Stopped the river, so they could cross it safely.) How does God help us? What can we do to thank and praise God for His help? (Thank Him in prayer. Sing songs of praise to Him. Write a poem to thank Him.)
3. Read **Matthew 9:18-26**. Who asked Jesus for help in this story? Why? What happened? What do you or other people in your family need help with? Pray together, asking Jesus for His help with your needs.
4. Read **Romans 8:38-39**. What can separate us from God's love? What would you say to a friend to describe God's love? Thank God that He promises to always love and care for us.

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