Next Is Now - Part 3

# Move Out

## (Joshua 3:1-17)

I am so glad that each one of you are here with us, and those of you tuning in from all over, wherever you are, I am so thankful for you. We are in part three of our message series: Next Is Now, and we are celebrating the very fact that God will never leave us nor forsake us, that he is with you every moment of every day. And so, a true worshiper can worship God anytime and anywhere, and so whether you are here or you’re connected online, you’ve been faithful and you’re doing whatever you’ve got to do to come together and worship Jesus this morning.

This is so important, because 2020 has been so strange, but I believe that we’ve all been learning that God’s presence is so much more than a feeling. And no matter what your situation is today, when you are up to your neck in trouble, when you can’t see the other side, God gives us the grace to get through it. I know that’s been the case for many of you this year, and God has given us other people to stand with us, to comfort us and encourage us. Not only that, he has given us his Word, which is super important, because it’s the one thing that lasts forever. Isaiah said it this way,

*“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8, NKJV).*

I am so thankful for his Word and that we have the opportunity to come together and worship Jesus. Because, it’s our praise this morning that is breaking through the difficulty of this season. And so, we’re not just walking through this difficult season, but we are praising God through this season. This is important, because the challenges that you and I are facing today need a soundtrack. You know, it’s our praise that tears down strongholds, that fights through the tears, it’s kind of like the Rocky soundtrack.

The thing about 2020 is that our spiritual enemy has been playing a different soundtrack. It’s not like God’s soundtrack, it’s not inspiring, it’s not triumphant, it’s not victorious, and so we’ve got to be careful not to listen to something that God didn’t intend for us to listen to. There are a lot of competing voices in the world, and so we want to listen carefully, leaning in and hearing God’s voice, because Jesus said it this way, he said,

*“My sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).*

And so, we’re not just going to make it through this season, we’re not just going to survive, but we’re going to grow and we’re going to come out on the other side even better. In fact, that’s what we’re going to see in the Word of God today, the Israelites are not just going to survive, but they are going to thrive. They are not just going to go through this, but they’re going to come out on the other side stronger and more resilient.

Last week we saw Joshua and the Israelites on the threshold of the promise and he told them to get ready because God was calling them to step out in faith, walking through their obstacles into their destiny. Today’s message is entitled “Move Out” and just like the Israelites we are moving out, we are walking through this season growing and changing so that we come out on the other side better than ever, stronger than ever, more prepared and better equipped for ministry than ever.

I believe in this season 2020, that you and I are standing on the threshold and God is going to do something great in us, great in his church, and great in this world. And I thought it was interesting that in Joshua chapter 3, what is really the beginning of what God had called Israel to do, that as they begin to take possession of the land, it also represented an ending of what they knew as normal. This is really practical for us to understand and recognize in this season, because for God to bring us into a new season, he has to disrupt what we perceive as normal. And so, this passage is going to show us a different way of seeing things, because as we are coming into one season, we are leaving another.

Let’s read together from the Scriptures, beginning in verse one of Joshua chapter 3:

*“Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over” (Joshua 3:1).*

So, they set out, all the Israelites set out, and this wasn’t something new, they have grown accustomed to this. They had been doing this for 40 years, but we are going to see something different today, because even though they’re going somewhere, it’s not so important where God is taking them as it is what he shows them along the way.

I believe this is really valuable for us to be able to glean from the Scriptures, because in so many ways we’re not really sure about our destination or how long it’s going to take to get there. There is just so much that we really don’t know, but you’re not the only one, because we’re all in this together. All the Israelites set out and I find this to be amazing because I have six kids, but here we’re talking about 2 million people or more. And so, this in itself is a miracle, because I can’t even get my kids to agree where they’re going to sit when we get into the car to come to church. I can’t get them to agree on what show to watch on Netflix and Joshua has to get all the Israelites across. And so, this is a miracle, but the thing is that we have a difficult time appreciating or recognizing a miracle when we are in the middle of it.

The thing is that we have all got to go through it together, we’ve got to get through this together, and so if we don’t think that we need to give right now, or we don’t need fellowship with one another, we’re going to miss it. In this season we’ve got to come together, however that looks for you, whatever is comfortable for you like never before. And the Bible says in verse two,

*“After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it” (Joshua 3:2-3).*

There is the title of my message, “Move Out.” He said, when you see the ark, move out and follow it. This was a command much like God told Abraham, “Go to the land I will show you.” Or as Jesus said to his disciples, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” And so, the officers went throughout the camp telling the people, “When you see the ark moving, go, move out, follow it.”

Now, I know there are some of you who are thinking, “Well, I need more information.” But the truth is, we don’t need more information, we just need to be obedient to the information that we already have, we know enough for today. And honestly, nobody knows what’s going on, nobody knows what’s happening, and so you know as much as anybody else right now. And yet, as followers of Christ, you know enough about God to get you through this valley.

King David talked about that in the Scriptures, because he knew about walking through the valley, and he knew he was going to get through it. He said in Psalm chapter 23,

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want” (Psalm 23:1).*

And so, he’s like, God will guide you. And right here in Joshua chapter 3, God is leading his people, he’s led them for 40 years in the wilderness, they’ve been through things before, but now they are standing at the threshold of something new. It’s just like we are and many of you have seen God bring you through great trials and difficulties before. You know how he has seen you through those relational train wrecks and those decisions that just about ruined your life. He saw you through all that and now you are standing at this and you are like, “I’ve never been here before.”

And it’s in that moment that faith has to take over what you feel, because before we move, we want details, but most of the time we can’t handle the details. We wanted details, but it wasn’t the time for details. And so, like Israel, we know that we’ve been called to move out, but we don’t understand the details, and so there is this uncertainty. We want God to show us step four, five, and six; but he’s not going to show us until we take one, two, and three. We want to make plans as the Bible says,

*“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).*

And so many times people ask me as a leader, where is God leading you, what is your plan for the future of the church? And honestly, my plan is rarely about the future, my plan is to be obedient today, because I can’t see the future, but today how can I be faithful to take the next step. Therefore, I can be confident, I can take a step of certainty, because God says,

*“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Joshua 1:5).*

And so, God determines our steps, but we must be willing to step out with a little uncertainty because if you don’t you are not living by faith. And so, the leaders of the people said move out from your positions and follow the ark, follow the presence of God. And in verse four,

*“Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before…" (Joshua 3:4).*

That almost seemed like a prophetic word for 2020, like it was written for our situation, but I quickly realized how self-centered and shortsighted it is to think that we are the first ones to ever go through anything. In fact, the Bible tells us,

*“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).*

And so, how can we say, “Look! This is something new”? Because it was already here long ago, it was here before our time in 1918, just 100 years ago, that one third of the world population became infected with the Spanish flu. It is estimated that about 500 million people became infected, 50 million people died worldwide, with about 675,000 deaths occurring in the United States.

And so, when Joshua tells the Israelites, “You have never been this way before,” it’s not that they are the first ones who ever went through anything. Certainly, they remember the stories of their fathers passing through the Red Sea. But he is specifically stating that they have not walked this way before, they have never crossed over here before, and so this is new territory. And so, he’s telling them to follow the ark, follow the presence of God, so that they will know which way to go, since they have never been this way before.

Now, this year may be unlike anything that we’ve ever been through, but it’s not like it’s never been this way before. And so, whatever you’re facing today is nothing new, it may be new to you, but it’s not new to God. In fact, not only did he see it coming, but he’s already in your tomorrow, and so he teaches us to be faithful with today. He tells us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And so, our responsibility is to pray today and trust him for tomorrow.

That is so important because he’s already got tomorrow worked out, he doesn’t need our help, and so we don’t need to worry, running around like unbelievers saying:

*“What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:31).*

Because our Heavenly Father knows what we need, he’s already worked it out, and therefore we can trust him to lead us and provide for us. Things may look different, it may not feel familiar, but it’s in those unfamiliar places that your faith grows, and you get to know who God really is.

Today, God is calling us to move, to step out in faith, and our church is growing stronger in this season. There are more people watching the sermon now than ever before and God is speaking his Word into so many more people’s lives; but look at verse four again, there’s something I want to show you. Verse four says,

*“You have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it" (Joshua 3:4).*

Now, this is a little confusing because I always thought God was supposed to come near in times of trial. And yet, this is a traumatic moment for the Israelites, they’ve been in the wilderness for 40 years, most of the people they’ve relied upon are dead, and now they’re going this way they’ve never been before and God tells them to keep their distance.

He said, “I want you to follow the ark, but don’t get to close.” And as I thought about that, I realized that he was teaching them something. This was a lesson that when he looks distance, seems distant, and feels distant, he really isn’t far off. His purpose is that we would seek him, reaching out for him and finding him, as the Bible says, because he’s not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27). But this is a lot more than 6 feet, this is more than just social distancing, this is a thousand yards, this is 10 football fields; but God was using that distance, that feeling of being distant as a gift to call us to go deeper in our faith, to call us to greater spiritual depth as we move out and follow him.

You see, when we’re going to places we’ve never been before, it often feels like God is distant, but he isn’t; the ark, this little chest made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold is right up there in front of us. It’s called the ark of the covenant, in other words it’s a covenant, but it’s not your agreement with God, it’s God’s agreement with you, and he’s got you covered. The ark is not very big, it’s only:

*“45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high” (Exodus 25:10, NLT).*

But that little wooden chest representing humanity, is overlaid with gold representing divinity, reminding us that no matter what you’re going through, you’re going to get through it because God’s got you covered.

And as they’re preparing to move out, getting ready to cross the Jordan, God is going before them, showing them what can’t be canceled, what can’t be shut down. And I’m so glad that the ark is up there in front of us in the distance, because when we’re going through something we can’t understand or what we’ve never been through before, God gives us something to look at that represents what can never be taken away. And so, in verse five, Joshua told the people,

*“Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you" (Joshua 3:5).*

In other words, God has been working and preparing, he’s already in tomorrow, but now this is our part. He says, “Consecrate yourselves.” And this is the meeting, the joining together with what God has done, what he will do, and it’s all found in his promise of the amazing things he will do “among you.” And so, not only do we have to trust God with the process, trusting him with tomorrow’s problems, but today he calls us to be still and consecrate ourselves. In other words, there is so much that God does in our lives that is part of his character, or that is characterized in being God, but then there’s also our responsibility.

In fact, you could say we each have a responsibility and God’s is tomorrow, he’s already there, and so we just need to consecrate ourselves today. Honestly, that’s all we can do, because we can’t predict what will happen tomorrow, all we can do is walk in it, following God. And so, Joshua said to the priests in verse six,

*“Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them” (Joshua 3:6).*

And the Lord said to Joshua in verse seven,

*“Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river” (Joshua 3:7-8).*

Now, you have to admit that must’ve been scary, because God didn’t just bring them through some shallow water, some little problem. The priests were going to step in the water first, but the Bible says in verse 15, now just so you know:

*“The Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest.”*

And so, God wants you to know that they were positioned for a miracle, because the size of the problem creates the opportunity.

Joshua told them to step in the water first because the priests and the ark, the worship goes first. That’s important to remember when we don’t know where we are going, don’t understand what’s going on, or there is a problem or trial that we are facing, and we are positioned for a miracle. Praise goes first, worship goes first, because the battle is the Lord’s, and the Bible tells us,

*“As soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing” (Joshua 3.15-16).*

As soon as the priests holding the ark stepped into the Jordan, as soon as they stepped, not as soon as they prayed, but as soon as they stepped God revealed himself in a deeper way. The miracle was in the step, he didn’t begin doing that deeper work until they were in it, not when they prayed, not when it was over, but while they were still in it. And as soon as their feet touched, when God said stop, the water that was in front of them, that obstacle that kept them separated from their promise stopped flowing, and the Bible says,

*“It piled up in a heap a great distance away” (Joshua 3:16).*

They stepped and it stopped. There are some of you who are waiting on it to stop, but God is waiting on a step. You see, he’s ready to do a miracle, but he’s waiting on faith, he’s waiting on a step, he’s waiting on worship, he’s waiting on praise.

You see, the miracle was in the step, the water wouldn’t have stopped, God wouldn’t have stopped it if they hadn’t stepped. But watch this in verse 17,

*“The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground” (Joshua 3:17).*

This was the beginning of an incredible series of miracles that we find recorded in Scripture and it all started with a step. I wonder what step God is asking you to take right now? I don’t know what it is, but you do. Maybe it is a step of surrender saying, “God, I don’t know what to do. I don’t know where to go, but I’m going to trust you. My marriage is falling apart, my finances are destroyed, I have lost hope in everything that I used to depend on, or I’m struggling with doubt and depression.”

What do you do when you’re dealing with that? You follow the example of the Israelites and you worship and step, you worship and step, trusting that God is making a way where there is no way, trusting that he has a plan and that he is already in your tomorrow.

Joshua didn’t have a plan mapped out, but in faith he steps, he moved out, going forward. He said consecrate yourself today and when you see the ark of the covenant, you are to move out, you are to follow it. He didn’t know all the details, but he obeyed the Word of the Lord every single day, step-by-step. You see, we don’t have to plan for the future, we just need to consecrate ourselves and being obedient to take the next step today.

When you get to that point, living by faith wherever you are, whatever you are doing, and you’re doing it all for the glory of Jesus. You don’t have to worry about the future, you are just obedient today. And so, when you take that step of faith, you are doing exactly what God wants you to do today, and you can trust that he will lead you to where he wants to lead you, so that your life will glorify him. Step-by-step, we make our plans, but the Bible says, *“The Lord determines our steps” (Proverbs 16:9)*.

Let’s pray.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

September 27, 2020

(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*