Next Is Now - Part 4

# Take It with You

## (Joshua 4:1-11)

Today we are wrapping up our message series “Next Is Now” and we are in week number four as we’ve been looking at the transition from Moses to Joshua. Moses is dead and now Joshua is taking the lead. He’s been given the responsibility of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, but even as they’re still in the middle of it, still working through it, still in process, we are going to see that God wants them to get something out of it. And so, that’s what I’m going to talk about this morning. Our message is entitled “Take it with you” and as we turn to the Word of God in Joshua chapter 4, I don’t want to assume that you understand the text or even that you’ve been following along for the past several months on this journey. And so, I want to catch you up and give you a snapshot of the context here in Joshua chapter 4.

This is a new generation of Israelites, because the former generation that had been liberated from slavery in Egypt has now died off in the wilderness, and this new generation is now on the threshold of the Promise. They are so close to walking in the Promised Land, but it’s been a long journey, there has been a lot of trouble, there have been accidents and deaths along the way. In fact, it has cost them much more than they had ever imagined to get to where they were.

Now, they’ve been through tragedy and triumph, impossibilities and miracles, and they’re standing on the threshold of coming into the place that God had promised their fathers. And so, they have imagined this moment, they have dreamed about having a plot of ground that was their own, of planting, gardening, and having a house. But they’ve never had a fixed address, or a house of their own, because they’ve always been on the move, and now Moses has died.

And so, Next Is Now, but it’s not playing out quite like they thought it would, they’re coming into the land flowing with milk and honey, but the game plan has changed. Everything is in transition because Moses is gone and now Joshua had been appointed as their new leader. Everything has changed for the Israelites, everything is new, and so there’s a lot of uncertainty because it’s unknown and unfamiliar.

Last week, we read that Joshua called them to break camp and move out, and we saw them stepping down into the Jordan River. Now he is leading this group of people who are mourning and telling stories of Moses. In other words, they are following Joshua, but they’re muttering under their breath, because that’s not the way Moses did it. And in a lot of ways, we’re in the same place today, because there are people who are whispering, grumbling and complaining that the church ought to be doing it this way, or they ought to be doing it that way, and so there is all this confusion because we’ve never been this way before.

In the same way, the Israelites are confused, they’re uncertain, because they’re coming into a new identity, they’re trying to figure out who they are and how they’re supposed to do it. They’ve followed Joshua down to the bank of the Jordan River and now they are uncertain, because they’ve never been here before. Joshua is uncertain because this isn’t the Red Sea; and so the leadership has changed, the geography has changed, but it’s really still the same thing, because God is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

It’s in that environment that Joshua tells the people: *“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you" (Joshua 3:5).*

And this was both a command and a promise, and yet the fulfillment of the promise depended on their obedience to the command. Their obedience wasn’t earning God’s blessing, but in consecrating themselves they were making sure their hearts were ready for God’s blessing.

This word consecrate means to be clean morally or ceremonially, in other words, both inwardly and outwardly, and the imagery symbolizes making a new beginning with the Lord. Just as Christians are new creations and the old has gone, we need new eyes to see that who we are in Christ completely changes everything. That’s why the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 1, that “God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless” (1:4). And so, when you get something new you want to protect it, you keep it clean and you keep it pure which is a picture of the Church as the bride of Christ prepared for the wedding.

Joshua tells the people: “Consecrate yourselves…" (Joshua 3:5). And so, God is calling them to dedicate themselves, to be set apart for him, to be holy and to purify themselves just like he did at Mount Sinai, just like Moses did in the Tabernacle, or Solomon in the Temple. And so, he calls his people to consecrate themselves both inwardly and outwardly and we want to prepare ourselves too. The Bible says,

*“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).*

And so, it’s not just an inward thing, because God tells us we need to cleanse the outside of the vessel before we can truly follow him. For example, when Jacob and his family returned to the Lord at Bethel they washed themselves and change their clothes (Genesis 35:1-3). After King David confessed his sin, he bathed, changed his clothes, and worshiped the Lord (2 Samuel 12:20). And this imagery is carried over into the New Testament where the Lord says,

*“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety…” (1 Tim 2:9).*

We don’t know exactly what amazing things God is going to do tomorrow, but we need to consecrate ourselves today, we need to prepare ourselves today, because Joshua says when you see the ark of the covenant, you are to move out, you are to follow it. And so, we don’t need to have all the details, we don’t need to have a plan, we just need to consecrate ourselves and follow God.

As we come to Joshua chapter 4, Joshua and the priests had to step down into the water. Moses would have just raised his staff and the waters would’ve parted, but God was doing something new. And so, Joshua and the priests had to take a step of faith; they had to get their feet wet, they had to get some mud between their toes, but the Bible says as soon as they stepped into the Jordan the water from upstream stopped flowing and the riverbed dried up.

I am believing that for some of you today, this is your moment, this is your time to step down into the water, to step into the confusion, the controversy, the messiness of 2020. Some of you are going to have to get down into it with Joshua, you’re going to have to risk getting a little muddy and say,

*“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).*

And so, Joshua and the priests were out there in the middle of it, but the people were told to keep their distance; the people were still far off, because they were keeping a thousand yards between them and the ark. And so, the Israelites were ten football fields away when the priests stepped in, when praise stepped in, when worship stepped in, and it’s at that moment that blessing came down. The glory of God came down in the middle of the Jordan River and when the Holy Spirit comes in like a flood you need to praise him, you need to lift your hands in worship, because if you want God to show up you’ve got to learn how to give him some praise. You’ve got to praise him like your saved, praise him like you’ve got a breakthrough, praise him like you’re more than a conqueror.

The people were still far off, because the priests had to go first, and so they’re standing in the middle, they’re standing on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan. And the Bible says this is it, next is now, and the Israelites are given the green light. Now they’re coming through in a hurry and the Bible says in chapter four, verse one:

*“When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood…" (Joshua 4:1-3).*

In other words, God was saying, “I want you to get something out of this, right in the middle of what you’re going through, right there where the priests stood, right there where they took a stand, right there where they stood on solid ground.” He said, “I want you to take twelve men and go back to the place where the priests stood, go back to where they were standing, right where they stood on the promises of God; and don’t just take any old stone, but take that stone, take that rock they were standing on, right there where they stood firm on the rock.”

And so, once all the people had crossed over, in verse three the Lord said, “Take up twelve stones from where the priests stood, because I’m going to turn your miracle into a memorial.” He said,

*“…Carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight" (Joshua 4:3).*

You see, this is their story, this is their history, and I know it just looks like a pile of rocks, but this is so important. You see, even now, you and I need something to prove to the world that we were there when God made a way where there was no way. So that we can point, “Right there; I was standing right there.” But too many times we rush out of the middle of whatever we’re going through, we leave our Jordan without getting our stones, and we lose our testimony to the goodness of God.

And so, God tells the people, “Go back and take it with you, don’t just be glad to get by, don’t go through all that and get nothing out of it. I didn’t take you through all of this for you not to get something out of it.” And he says in verse six, “Go back and get 12 stones, take them with you…

*“…to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever” (Joshua 4:6-7).*

This is so important because your children and your grandchildren need to see your stones. They need to know that you’ve been through some stuff, that the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. They need to know that if God is for you, who can be against you. They need to know that if you’re in a struggle, if you’re in a battle, you’re going to stand firm, you’re going to stand on the rock. But your children need to see it modeled in your life, they’ve got to see it in front of them, they’ve got to climb on the stones, they’ve got to see it in your life. And so, God said, “Take it with you,” and in verse eight:

*“The Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day” (Joshua 4:8-9).*

You see, it’s these twelve stones, twelve sons of Israel, twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, twelve disciples, twelve baskets of leftovers, twelve apostles, twelve thrones, twelve foundations and the twelve gates in the New Jerusalem with twelve angels at the gates. It’s these twelve stones, they’re still there to this day, and you’ve got to take these twelve stones and pile them up where you live. This is the foundation you want to build your life on so that when you children pass by and ask you what is the meaning of the stones? You can tell them that when you crossed over, when you were going through it, it was these twelve stones that were in the middle, and the Lord met you there in the middle, he stood with you there in the middle.

*He said, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you” (Isaiah 43:2).*

And so, it’s these stones, these twelve stones that testify to the truth, they testify to the validity of the Lord’s promise:

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

And so, here we are in 2020, and the message of the stones is the only thing we have to stand on. They might be rough and dirty, but they’re our stones, and so we don’t need to wash them off to make ourselves look good. You see, you can’t change the truth and these twelve stones are the places where our father’s feet tread, where the fathers of our faith stood firm, and so these are our stones. They’re the story of our faith, the memories of our history, and the promise of our future. These 12 stones are how we got here, they are how we can stand when it doesn’t look like it’s working, when you’re standing all by yourself, when you’re scared, discouraged, and tired. This is what our faith is all about, it’s in the stones, you just remain standing because that’s who you are.

The Bible says in verse 10, *“The priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched” (Joshua 4:10-11).*

The priests remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was accomplished. Then they sent back twelve men from the twelve tribes to take up twelve stones because God had said, “Take it with you, don’t leave it in the middle, because it’s a testimony that I was with you in the middle of it.”

You see, that’s what Jacob came to understand, God would change his name to Israel, but when he was still in the middle of it, when he was still wrestling with God he said,

*“Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it” (Genesis 28:16).*

And sometimes, we’re looking for God’s presence when all we really need is more awareness. Like Jacob who woke up and said, “Surely God is in this place.” And even this week as I was preparing this message, I’m aware that we’re being positioned. We’re moving into position, we’re setting up, we’re getting ready, because the Lord is in this place and we’re going to be used by God in this season.

Our responsibility as the church is to consecrate ourselves, to get ready, to be here, whatever that looks like, no matter what that is, but we’re to remain standing. And I know that our nation is a mess right now, and we certainly can’t minimize the pain and the hardship that many people are experiencing, but we need to be aware that God does his biggest miracles in the middle of our most hopeless situations.

This is what we see as the nation of Israel was at the threshold of the promise, this was their moment, next is now, and yet they faced it like a disruption, like an inconvenience, like many of us are experiencing life right now. You know, there are just so many broken hearts right now, so many disruptions, so many difficulties, and you would think the Israelites would be dancing as they crossed over, coming into their destiny. You would think that they would have their tambourines out, dancing and shouting, celebrating the goodness of God like they did the Red Sea. But that wasn’t the case, in fact, verse 11 says,

*“The people hurried over, and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched” (Joshua 4:11).*

When I expected the children of Israel to be dancing, they were watching, they were hurrying, they weren’t dancing at all, because there are these things that happened. And so, they’re entering into the promise, but their dancing has turned into mourning, because Moses was dead. These people who were known for their pageantry and worship are now silent, they are watching, and God tells them, “Take 12 stones, take them with you, and set them up as a memorial.”

How do you keep standing in faith?

You remember that it’s all about the stones, that God stood with you in the middle because he promised,

*"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

Some of you, you’ve come to a place in your faith where you feel like you’ve got nothing left; you’re weak, you’re tired, but that’s the point when you have the potential to be the strongest. You see, it’s not in your own power, but that’s when God’s power becomes most real, because he gets in the middle with you. That’s a stone you can stand on, and it’s a New Testament principal, it’s a promise of God. He said,

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

In other words, when you get to the end of your strength, when you’ve got nothing else to give, God takes over. In Joshua chapter 3, the Lord stepped in just a moment after the priests stepped down into the Jordan carrying the ark of the covenant and the Bible says,

*“The Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by…” (Joshua 3:17).*

You see, it’s not until you fully embrace your weakness, that you learn to appreciate and experience Christ’s strength. When you recognize that you don’t have anything else to give, that’s when his power becomes more real than ever before. And so, until you embrace your weakness, you’ll never fully understand his strength.

Some of you are right there, this is so relevant, and God is meeting you in the middle because there is something that you need, something that you’re praying about, something you’re begging God to deliver you from. Maybe you’re praying for God to end this season of COVID-19, to end this season of pain, of difficulty, and loss, but I wonder if he might just get right down in it with you?

You see, it may not be what you’re asking for, but you don’t want to minimize what the presence of God in your circumstance will accomplish, because when God shows up and helps you through, the world will look on and God will be glorified. When you stand in the middle of that struggle, that challenge, that battle, people are looking on, they’ll see you, but they’ll glorify God.

And so, it is, when your faith is tested, when you’re out there in the middle, and people look at you and ask, “How are you able to remain standing, how are you hanging in there, how come you haven’t given up?” Without even taking a breath you’re able to testify, to witness to the power of Christ in you and say like the apostle Paul,

*“For Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).*

This one thing I know, his strength is made perfect in my weakness and because I’ve embraced my weakness, I’ve tapped into his strength. And so, I trust in a God who is good, who is working in all things to bring about good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. That’s how I continue to stand. And so, when we’ve done everything else, we stand firm, because our God has been faithful to us through Jesus, and therefore we will always be faithful to him.

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