

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
**Joshua 3:1-17**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us come to God in prayer as we approach His , let us pray

Come Holy Spirit, change our hearts and minds to be more like Jesus.

Come Holy Spirit, equip us for the purposes of Jesus.

Come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus name, Amen

Someone once said “I have a dream.” a dream” that was fueled by faith, a dream that was an outworking of relationship with the living God and which sought for change to come upon the earth so that the kingdom of God would be seen in that day.

Friends, do we have a dream? Do we have a dream for how our faith might be worked out today? Do we have a dream for the future of our church family and, if you were to try and answer that, would it be about survival or would it be tied to buildings? Because, honestly, I’m not really sure God’s very interested in mere survival or even our buildings, because he is allowing buildings and congregations to close in our nation.

So, if you were to try and share a dream for how your faith might be worked out or a dream for our church family, any dream must further God’s purposes, it must further the commission given to us by Jesus when he said to His church “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Friends, do we have a dream that is more than simply about survival and about ourselves? Do we aspire, do we yearn, do we hope for others to come to know the living God? Because, brothers and sisters, in the last two years since I’ve been here, the number of people who have come forward with an idea or have articulated a yearning for the commission of Jesus to be worked out in our day, the proportion who have done this is quite small. Now, why is that?

There could be any number of reasons as to why, and in previous sermons I’ve tried to speak into some of the different possible issues, but today I want to speak into something different, something that has to be there for anyone to be able to say “I have a dream.”

In our passage today we see an incredible moment in the history of God’s people where they cross over into the promised land but I think we kind of gloss over this passage almost. So, let’s take a minute just to familiarize ourselves with the details.

Here are a great multitude of God’s people, more than can be counted, and they are to cross the Jordan in the springtime when the snows on Mount Hebron would have melted and the spring rains had come, so the river Jordan is at its fullest, highest point. In modern times this would be about 10 feet deep and at the point of crossing about a hundred foot wide. Maybe in their day it was less, maybe it was more, but either way, God, through Joshua, foretells that an amazing thing is going to happen, for Joshua says “See the ark of the covenant of the Lord will go into the Jordan ahead of you and as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord set foot into Jordan its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.” and then going on to verse 16 we see that the water from upstream stopped flowing, it piled up in a heap, a great

distance away at a town called Adam. Now, we are not familiar with the geography so we make just about nothing of this, but Adam was 18 miles away from where they crossed, so God just created 18 miles of dry land for this great multitude to cross. I don't know what your mental picture of the river crossing was, but mine wasn't 18 miles across, a hundred foot wide river was it - was it yours? God did do the amazing thing Joshua foretold in verse 5 because God is a wonder working God, and his ancient people knew this. Likewise, when Jesus came, the disciples saw how he transformed people's lives, how he brought freedom and salvation and hope and joy. God's people, in the time of Joshua, might not know how they were going to cross the Jordan, and the disciples might not know how Jesus was going to fulfill His mission, and the church after Pentecost might not know how it was going to take the Gospel to the nations, but in those previous times they knew God to be this wonder working God, because he's the living God, the Lord of all the earth, such that all authority and power are His for anyone to claim, as Joshua did. That the Lord will do amazing things for anyone to claim that they have a dream inspired by faith then there needs to be expectation that God cares, that He is powerful and that He is present and works through His people. I wonder friends, do we have that same expectation and confidence?

Maybe we don't dream because we don't think God does the incredible or maybe we doubt our calling to partner with Him, to bring about the incredible, but do you remember what Jesus said in John 14 he said "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father."

Too often I think, these words scare us and so we try to downplay them, we reduce them to nice human ability things like caring and love and sharing the good news. But do you know that even those things are beyond mere human ability, because who amongst you is ready to say you love like Jesus or that you have the boldness of Jesus to share the good news. I'm not so, why did we reduce this to a mere minimal thing?

Jesus says we "will do even greater things" and the context is about making Jesus and the Father known. We can make Jesus known in many ways, through praying for the miraculous, through sharing the good news, through care and love and service, but the point is that Jesus evidenced all those things and so we too should evidence all those things, that it can and should and must include every way of making Jesus known.

Maybe we don't have a dream because we don't expect greater things. Maybe we don't dream because we don't really trust Jesus as the living God. Maybe we don't dream because our aspirations are too low.

In the book I'm going to get you to read hopefully over the summer Francis Chan says "We need to expect more. We've become too easily satisfied. We're content if a person leaves, pleased God wants them out. We have settled for the natural and our choices give little evidence that we believe in the Holy Spirit. For this reason we end up with gatherings that are very explainable and at times feel mechanical and even obligatory."

The people of God, in Joshua's day, expected more. They walked towards that river not knowing how God would do it, but knew He had promised to do it, do amazing things, greater things. Friends, do we need to up our expectation of God and dream again? But maybe we'd say "Well you know Scott, it was really easy for the Israelites because you know they had the Ark." The Ark was a symbol of God's presence. Israel understood it to be a representation of God's royal throne and his footstool, not that God's presence was located there alone, but it pointed away from itself to remind the Israelites that, though God was invisible, he was still there and he could still do things with overwhelming power, unlike the idols of other nations, and with such a visible reminder we might say "Well it was easy for them to expect more."

Likewise we might say it was quite easy for the early church because after all the very presence of God became human and they saw the miraculous before their eyes. "Easy for them." we might say. But friends, this is to forget what is different about our time and theirs. They didn't have the scriptures like we do. They didn't have access to worldwide testimony from over thousands of years now like we do. But, most importantly of all, God's presence was identified with an Ark and then with individuals, ultimately Jesus, because up until that point, there was no way for people at large, God's people at large, to receive the Holy Spirit, but let's remember what Jesus goes on to say immediately after He spoke about the greater things He said this "I will ask the Father and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth."

To each person who claims faith in Jesus, to everyone who says they have called upon Jesus for salvation, they have received the Holy Spirit, the question then is "Will we believe God's word or not?" and if we will trust it, will we allow it to shape our thinking and our identity and so our expectations and actions.

I could share stories of how in recent months God's Spirit has been at work amongst us as a congregation, of one woman who had an electricity problem and the Spirit guided her to the problem which would have only been found out when the house burned down; I've never heard of that one before, but I was rejoicing!; or how God through His word has been shaping people's lives and bringing great things about in their lives; or how someone placed a hand on someone and prayed for someone and God brought new life to be.

Friends, maybe we don't expect much, maybe we don't dream because we don't realize what it is to be a Christian. The apostle Paul said "We are carefully joined together in Jesus becoming a holy temple for the Lord; through him you also are being made part of this dwelling where God lives by His Spirit now all glory to God who is able through His mighty power at work within us to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." We might not have the Ark but we have the Holy Spirit amongst us and within us. Maybe it's time we let the scripture shape our thinking, our identity, so we might start to dream of the greater things that God might do among us for his purposes?

There's one extra thing to draw from our passage today for our commission. Sure, the people had a great leader like Joshua, and they had the Ark amongst them, and they

knew God was the living God and a wonder working God, but, nevertheless, they still had to obey, they had to step out in faith. You can almost imagine, or at least I imagine, the priests carrying the Ark, walking towards the water getting ever close to that water's edge, and someone turning to the other guys and saying "Hey Dave, do you think this will really happen because it seems mental!" You can clearly tell they were from Whitburn! Like "Come on!" or imagine being one of the people crossing the river and you're just waiting for this water to start rushing down and carry you away, like they still had to journey and faith across that river bed, they had to obey, but is that the point. Where they were called to, first call to faith and obedience, the point of the crossing?

The answer is "No!" because in verse 5 Joshua says "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." Consecrate yourselves - we gloss over those two words. What does that mean? and yeah it would have included things they were to stop doing and certain things they were to do and probably neither of those groups are things that we could apply to our time, but to consecrate yourself, to consecrate anything, was to give yourself to God's purposes, to give yourself over to God and so when consecration is about an individual, is about the heart, is your heart given over to God, is your heart responding in faith, is your heart responding in obedience to the Lord? That's where it began for Israel, the day before the miracle, and it included mundane things like washing clothes, apparently, and abstaining from good things, denying themselves, because you don't see the miracle without faith, but faith begins in the ordinary everyday rhythms of life.

So, what about us friends? Where do we need to consecrate ourselves afresh? Where do we need to give ourselves to the purposes of God today? Because, here's another thing, thrown lots at you this morning, here's another thing, the Israelites one of consecration, big miracle, but Jesus doesn't say how often the greater things will happen and if you're reading through the New Testament plan with us it's almost like it happened every day for the new, the early church. So, every day is the potential for greater things, and so every day there's the call of God to consecrate yourself and maybe for you, it's giving time to the Lord in prayer and in His word. Maybe for you it's giving your money to the purposes of the Lord. Maybe for you it's choosing to become a member here and saying God I'm in this with these people, for this area, for your purposes. Maybe it's coming to the Prayer Meeting. Maybe it's getting involved and serving in some way and sharing a new idea even, the specifics are between you and the Lord but most likely every one of us is called in some way to consecrate ourselves afresh.

Friends, if we are to have a dream, if we are to begin dreaming again of what God's purposes might be in our day, then we must begin to expect greater things, we must have faith in the living God, not a God of an old book who we think is just a wee dream or a child story, that His presence is amongst us and within us, and that He is calling us, even today, to give ourselves for His purposes.

So why don't we respond in faith just now and let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we don't know all that this might mean for us and it probably brings a whole load of feelings to the surface, I know it did for me Lord when just this past week I felt You'd call me to step out and lay a hand on and pray for someone,

and it was super scary,

but You're the one there working, God, and You're the living God and You call us to give ourselves to You and Your purposes. Lord, may we hold nothing back, may we give You our all and may we go in Your strength, Your power, Your Spirit's power at work in us and through us. Lord give us ears to hear this day to where You're calling, for we ask it in Jesus name, Amen.