

Are We There Yet?
3-Year Bible Reading Plan
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Joshua 1. As you're turning to Joshua 1 in the Old Testament, I do want to take a brief moment to do somewhat of a disclaimer to those of you today who may be first time guests or visitors with us, or maybe for whatever reason, are brand new to our fellowship or maybe you've just moved into town, there are going to be times today that it may appear at times that I'm referring to events or things in the recent and distant past as far as our church body is concerned, and I don't want you to feel like you're left out, I don't want you to feel like you don't know the vocabulary and such, I will make you a promise that by the time we get to the end of the message whether you have grown up here on the cradle roll or you walked in for the very first time, I promise the Lord's gonna bring it all together, for today we come on a very, I think it's a very special day, it's a day of providence. You say, "What do you mean it's a day of providence?" Well, that's one of those big theological words that we use all the time and often we say, "Oh, I know what providence is," when we're really just trying to get to the next subject matter because we really don't know what it is, but providence means that God is working in the background, that God is maneuvering and God is putting things in place that oftentimes are unbeknownst to us and we're able to look back, you know, hindsight is 20/20, we're able to look back in time and say that the Lord knew exactly what he was doing even if we didn't understand the who, the what, the when, the where, and the why. Today you're gonna see that Joshua 1 is an incredible providential passage not just for you as an individual, not just for your family but for us as a body of believers as a local church body, for as you walk into Joshua 1, you discover that the Israelites are about to go into the Promised Land.

You know, when we put this Bible reading plan together some years ago, I want you to just kind of hear the chronology here. It was about two years ago that we began to put the Bible reading plan together, and I know many of you have come to me and said, "What was the order of this?" Well, to be quite honest with you, the way that we put the order was not Genesis all the way to Revelation, is we began with the fact that we wanted to walk through a Gospel during the "Christmas season" every year, and then other than that what we really prayed through was what books of the Bible fit with what timeframes, and that really is the gist of it, you know, it's not like we're trying to connect themes and such, we just were kind of working with the calendar. I had no idea how relevant today's message would be to what I'm about to share with you. You understand it was about two

years ago that we said this would be the time period we would walk through the book of Joshua, not knowing what I'm gonna share with you in just a few moments. Do I have your curiosity now? Some of you who use this as your 30 minute nap time said, "I'm not gonna sleep today. I want to know what's going on there."

So Joshua 1. As I mentioned, the Israelites are about to go into the Promised Land, the wilderness experience has passed, slavery in Egypt is in the distant rearview mirror, and we discover that they are three days away from placing their feet in the Jordan River, they're three days away from it being parted as the Red Sea was, they are three days away from walking into a land that they had been hoping for, dreaming of, and expecting for many many generations. So what does the Lord share with them? Here are his instructions, it says,

1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. 5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. 6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. 7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. 9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. 10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 11 Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

Now you and I have the privilege of hindsight. We know the rest of the story. We know that the priests did exactly as they were commanded. We know that the tribal leaders gathered together. We know that they placed their feet in the water in faith and trusting God and he parted them just like he did the Red Sea in Moses' day. We understand that they took the stones out, they celebrated, they remembered. We know they walked around Jericho and the walls came tumbling down. But chapter 1 in the book of Joshua is

critical to us because it lets us know what did the Lord instruct them to do to walk into the Promised Land. Now that's a term we use a lot of times in our culture today, that we walked into our Promised Land, we entered our Promised Land, and this is a message today for each of us differently. For some of us there is Promised Land that the Lord has been working in your individual lives for years, for we as a church family, we're gonna discover today he's been working in our lives for a lot longer to such a time as this, as was written in the book of Esther.

The first thing I want to address is simply this: what were the promises of God? What did he promise them? Look in verse 3, "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon I have given you as I said to Moses." Interesting what God promises the Israelites, he promises them that as they trust him to go over Jordan, that which they will see in the days ahead will be even greater than that which they've seen in days past. Now I want you to think about that from a historical perspective. These are the people who were called out of Egypt by a burning bush that was not consumed. These are the people who saw the famous 10 plagues go before them into Egypt but yet Goshen was spared. These are the people who had fathers and grandfathers and grandmothers who walked through the dry Red Sea. These are the same individuals that saw manna from heaven descend for 38 years, their clothes did not wear out, neither did their shoes. These people had seen God move in a mighty way but what does he say? Every place your foot goes. In other words, it reminds of Ephesians 3:20 that says, "Unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than we could ever think or ask, according to the Spirit that is within us." Understand that as a believer in Jesus Christ, as a group of believers in Jesus Christ, what we can learn from this is that the Lord desires to do more in our lives tomorrow than even he did yesterday, but we've got to do it according to his process that we'll discuss in just a moment.

Let me address that providence issue again. I don't know if you're aware of this, many of you may be, but we have had a striking presence on our campus in days gone past, in fact, in recent months you may have noticed an increase of people worshiping with us, celebrating with us, being baptized before us, who happen to be of a Korean descent. Now can we all just confess that a year ago none of us had any idea what the Lord was up to. Let's go even further back. None of us could have realized, in fact, in 1859 when this great church was started, they had no idea that one day it would be right in the middle, right between Ikea and Honda factory. Nobody knew. That's providence. That is the Lord working things out and putting things into place. A year ago, there are none of us who gathered up and said, "You know what? I got a really good idea, I think we ought to be strategic about reaching the Korean people." That wasn't on our agenda but it was on God's agenda and he has allowed us to see fruit be born that we never dreamed we could see. He says, "Wherever your foot goes," it just so happens that we've got a lot of people of Korean descent in our community whom he is blessing and he is doing in our lives what he did here in theirs, for they would go to lands and they would be among people that they had not known before.

It's interesting that when you look at the promises of God, one of the things he says is this, "You do not need to be fearful of anybody." And we understand the Bible says in 2

Timothy that we do not have the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind, and we love to quote that verse but we rarely live by it. Allow me to illustrate. I know many of you are familiar with the fact that we have now entered a very important season in the life of those that live in this community, it's called football season. Anybody tired of football yet? Alright, if you are, just repent at the end of the service, it's gonna be okay. I'm teasing. Can I just share with you, now this is just Jeff here, this is just me. I'm gonna take my pastor hat off and put my used to be, pretended to be an athlete on, okay? One of the things, and it doesn't have to be football, it can be any sport, it can be just in the business of life, one of the things in light of what the Scriptures are telling us in Joshua 1 and 2 Timothy 1 that I really struggle with is when I observe, and I have to be careful not to walk in this path myself, is to observe when we operate out of fear. Now let me put that in football terms, it's called the prevent defense. Y'all know what the prevent defense does? It prevents you from winning, that's what it is. It's when you've got a lead that you're scared can be taken away, so you sit back and you give them everything in the middle, and I won't get into all the X's and the O's there, but you see that in life, right? In business, we're fearful our competitor might get an edge. In life, we are fearful that something could go wrong. Can I tell you what fear eventually does? Fear gets to the point in our lives where it paralyzes us and we do nothing. That's what it says. That's what it is.

What does he say here? "Do not fear." Not those in Jericho. Not the Hittites. Not those in Ai. It says there is not a single person that can stand before you. What the Lord is telling the Israelites is simply this, if they will embrace his promises, if they will believe that if they are stepping foot step-by-step with him wherever he leads them, by the way, hopefully you've read through Joshua, do you see where he leads them? These are the people that the spies came back and said, "Man, they're bigger than we are. They're stronger than we are. They're wealthier than we are. We can't do it." Yet there were two spies who said, "We believe the Lord can pull this off." When you read through the rest of the book of Joshua, you discover that God's promises were not void and their fears should have never been realized.

So what's the process? How do we go about embracing this in our lives? Notice what it says in verse 6, "Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee wherever you go." So what is God's process? His promise is to bless. His promise is they shall see things greater in days ahead than they've even seen in days past.

So how does the Lord say that it should be done? It's pretty simple. He says, "Do what I tell you to." That's it. Those are the instructions. Not get creative. Not come up with some

master plan. He says, "As I have written, do it." Now I want you to understand how frivolous this can sound in our lives because when you get to chapter 6, the Lord has one of the greatest battle strategies known to man. If you're not familiar with the battle of Jericho, here's what the Lord said, "They are bigger than you, they are stronger than you, they are more fortified than you, so here's what I want you to do, I want you to walk around the city and don't say a word. Be very quiet. Do it once a day for six days. On the seventh day, I want you to do it seven times, and then when I give you the signal, I want you to shout with everything you've got."

Now when Joshua gave those instructions, you know that there was at least somebody who said, "This guy's lost his mind. They got big walls. They got big weapons. We're outnumbered. This is insane." No, insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. You know what they had been doing? Rejecting the word of God. That's what they had been doing year after year after year, and finally the Lord says, "Okay, I know it doesn't sound right, I know it's a little bit crazy, but just do it."

So what did they do? They walked around and we know the rest of the story, the walls came down. His process for us to embrace what he has for us not just in this day but the days ahead, the Lord's process is to always do it his way even if it doesn't make sense to the world, even if it doesn't make sense to you, even if it doesn't make sense to anybody else. If his word says this is how you orchestrate your family, that's how you orchestrate your family. If his word says this is how you handle your finances, this is how you handle your finances. If his word says this is how you handle temptation, that is how you handle temptation. You do know that the greatest devastation as far as temptation is concerned with humanity is when you say, "Oh, I think I can handle this." Oh no, no, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, it is the Lord who provides the out, not you who can conjure up the strength in your own.

So what we see here is God's promise, everywhere they go he will bless, he will take care of. We see his process, it's real simple, "Do as my word has said. Just trust me. Walk in my ways and let's see what happens." Then we get to our "partnership." Notice what it says in verse 10, "Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it." You may not realize the significance of what you just read. He says, "Okay, it's three days away. The priests are gonna put their foot in the water and you better make sure that you've done everything I've commanded you to do, you'd better make sure everything has been constructed, that everything's in the right order, the right people are in place, the right order is there and everything is as it should be." In other words, their partnership with God – listen to this – was to believe his promise and to trust his process. That's the partnership. In other words, they had to believe that God knew what he was talking about. They had to believe that God knew what he was doing. They had to trust that if they actually did what he told them to and put their foot in the water, it would actually part. Here's what you do not see in the next three chapters: nobody builds a boat or a raft. Nobody. Why? Because that's not what the Lord said. The Lord said to bring a certain amount of things together and to step in the water. "Don't come up with

your own idea, don't build a raft, don't put a boat together. No, do it my way." You see, man's partnership is always to believe God's promises and to trust his process.

I think it's interesting, you'll see this in just a moment, that the Lord says, "In three days." In other words, they were very close to their final destination. You understand this was a destination that they had been waiting for for almost 500 years. I mean, think about that, they had gone into what we know as the land of Egypt during a time of famine, and even though through Joseph the Lord provided all of the nourishment that they needed in those days, the Bible records there was a Pharaoh that raised up who knew not Joseph, so for 400 years they were enslaved. Now they left their land because of the drought, all they wanted to do was get back to the land, for 400 years they're in Egypt, for 40 years they're in the wilderness, it's been almost 500 years, what does God say? "You're three days away." Let me share what this sounds like as a parent or a grandparent. Have you ever taken a road trip with your kids or grandkids? How many times have you heard this, "Are we there yet? How much longer?" It's amazing, you're pulling out of the driveway, 10 hour drive, "Are we there yet?" But you know when it becomes most volume-ous is when you're almost there. I mean, you know you're within the hour, everybody's getting a little cranky, everybody's getting a little tired, and the hardest part of a journey is the last part of the journey. Why? Because you're tired. I mean, think about these people, these individuals had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, they were the young ones who did not reject the word of the Lord, these individuals even as adults had to go through the processes that the Lord commanded as far as their cleanliness and circumcision and such. These were the ones who for 40 years watched their parents and grandparents die out, and they were three days away.

You say, "Why is that so significant?" Because oftentimes when we're the closest to the goal we struggle the most with trusting God because we look back and say, "But it's been so long. Why aren't we there yet?" How does this apply to your life? I don't know what the Lord's been doing in your specific life but I do know that Luis Palau who's often referred to as the Billy Graham of South America, made a great statement once, he said most people give up on God's plan for their life within two years of his providing whatever it was they desired. They wait, they pray for two decades, and it's the last two years that they say, "I can't go any further in the journey." How many times do you see in Scripture characters both men and women who get to the very end of a scenario and they divert or they take an exit right before the finish line? All of us are guilty that at some level but I want to kind of take this a little different path today because we could talk about this as individuals all day long but let's talk about this as a body of believers, let's talk about this as a church, and if you're a guest or a visitor with us, just work with me for a moment, I promise this is all going to make sense. You may not realize this in the providence of today, but you and I as a family of faith, we are very close to the end of a journey. We are very close to a very specific destination for over the last almost 20 years, you and I and we collectively and many others have come and trusted the Lord to move in a mighty way in this place and in this area, and we've walked in faith with the Lord in the process of being faithful to his word in all kinds of respects.

Well, today in God's providence two years ago when we put this together, we would have had no idea what I'm about to share with you. Those of you that do not know, we are closely coming upon the end of our debt journey. We're almost there. You say, "Well, how are we there yet?" Let me answer your question. We're gonna put a slide up on the screen. There's only one comma in that number, \$985,000. Now I know what some of you are thinking, "That's a really big number." Hey, it's a big number for me too but you realize over time how many millions of dollars it has been? Can I share with you that like the Israelites, we're about three days away. I mean, we're just right there. We've been walking this journey for years and been faithful and obedient time after time after time, and some of you are thinking, "How many more checks, how many more laps, how many more building funds?" Guess what? The Israelites thought the same thing, "How much longer?" But there comes a day where you've just got to go across the Jordan River. The Lord calls you and says, "Step out on faith, put your foot in the water, and we're gonna watch some walls come down in Jericho."

Now for those of you who may not be aware, this debt number, let's just presume, I don't want to assume anything, I want to presume, let's presume when this number is eradicated because we're gonna talk about that in a moment. You know this number is gonna eventually be zero, right? I mean, it's just basically laws of mathematics. It's really an issue about timing. We're gonna talk about that in just a moment. So what's gonna happen? Remember what the Lord said, "Everywhere your foot goes, I've got incredible plans, incredible things for you." There are three main things that will take place in our lives as a family of faith when this number hits zero. We have designated and met and talked and basically those resources which you see that other number? \$729,000 per year will get allocated to three specific ministry areas.

Number one is this, the enhancement of just what we're already doing. Whether it be our student ministry, our children's ministry, senior adult ministry, worship ministry, whatever it is, we'll take an allocated amount of that, we'll roll it into what we do every day around here, ministering to people's lives, seeing the Lord transform their lives, just doing it with a greater capacity. I'm kind of car guy, what that basically means is we're gonna put a turbocharger on the budget, so to speak. We're gonna be able to go a little bit further and a little bit faster with that which we do every single day.

The second thing is this, we're gonna take a significant portion of that and we're gonna put it aside for future opportunities. Now I've had many of you ask me, "What are those future opportunities?" I don't know. The Israelites didn't have a clue what was gonna happen on the other side of Jordan. I don't have a clue what's gonna happen this afternoon, much less next year. You say, "What are future opportunities?" Can I take you back a year? Did anybody see the Korean ministry blossoming as it has? We didn't see that. We don't know what the future holds, we don't know what the Lord's gonna do. We have no idea who he will call us to, how he will call us to them, or what that's going to involve. Simply put what it means is, "God, we're believing, we're trusting that you've got things ahead of us that we can't even dream about today. We want to be prepared when you reveal it to us." That's what that is.

Ah, and there's that third one, what we know as missions. Now for those of you maybe new to us or may not realize how things operate, 10% of everything that we receive financially as a church body, 10% of it goes into what is commonly referred to as the cooperative program. You say, "Well, what is that?" That is Baptist churches all over the land cooperating together, collecting and bringing our resources together to help support over 5,000 missionaries all over the world. When you see these natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes and such and you see the relief effort of Baptists, that's where that comes out of in advance. So our faithful giving allows those emergency personnel to be there as soon as the storm hits land or strikes.

So that 10% is already taken care of. That number you see of 3.75%, that's in addition to. As soon as that big number hits zero, that portion is going to double. In other words, what we do as far as sending people, what we do as far as sponsoring individuals, what we do as far as helping people not only go to the field long term but short term, the capacity to reach that even in our own community will instantly double as far as the numerical value. So as soon as that big number hits zero, as soon as we "cross the Jordan River," all that we do every day is enhanced, we're setting aside preparing for what God's got great in the future, and we're gonna take our mission capacity and double it in addition to what we're already doing. Now I don't know about you, but that sounds like a pretty good Promised Land.

Now here's the statement, what if? You say, "What do you mean what if?" I mentioned to you that it's going to hit zero, right? It's going to, the question is what if and I'm gonna give you three scenarios. There were three days in Joshua that they had to prepare for crossing, I'm gonna give you three scenarios. Allow me to begin with the first one. Let's just say today that you leave here in a minute and say, "Do you know what? That pastor has lost his mind. There is no reason to go forward. I don't like any of the ideas. It's the worst think I've ever heard of." Well, I've got bad news for you, it's still getting paid off in about 15-16 months. In other words, if we decide to do nothing, say, "Yeah, let's just sit on this thing, who knows?" We decide, "Yeah, we're not gonna contribute anymore, we're not gonna give anymore, just let it ride." Well, about Christmas time next year, that number is hitting zero and when that number hits zero, our ministries get enhanced, we begin to get excited and prepared for whatever the Lord is coming in the future, and our missions budget doubles. By Christmas of next year, that's the worst case scenario. Worst case.

Then there's the second scenario. What if we see what we've seen in days gone by? You say, "What are days gone by?" Traditionally here, and by the way, just the blessing and the provision of God, traditionally here at the end of the calendar year we typically see our resources, our giving as more in excess of our budget and our spending, and typically we use those resources for projects here and there, but we also have the tradition of using those resources to pay down that debt. Now I don't know what will or might not be allocated, given and such, I can only tell you what's happened in the past. I cannot promise what's gonna happen in the future. But if we decide to just say, "You know what? We're just gonna give as we've usually given and it'll be normal," like we typically do at the end of the year, if we allocate those resources to that debt number, then we're

gonna "go into the Promised Land" about mid-year next year. That's right, if we do nothing, Christmas next year. If we do like we've traditionally done in years past, by about the middle of 2020 that debt is gonna be erased and all those opportunities are gonna lie before us.

But what if, what if we said, "You know what? I don't want to wait until Christmas 2020. I don't want to wait until midyear next year. I would love to roll into the next year, I would love to go into the next year not having to worry about that debt anymore, not having to worry about that building fund anymore. I would love to see that missions budget double next year. I'd love to see things enhanced next year. I would love to begin the process of seeing what God's gonna do in the future next year." Well, then as soon as that number is eradicated, that formula goes into place. I want you to hear what this means. Our building debt is soon going to be eliminated. It's just a matter of time, either a little over a year, about half a year, or as soon as it is eradicated. It's going to happen, we're going to cross our Jordan, we're going to go into our Promised Land, the only issue among us is what's the time frame gonna be? It's going to happen, what you and I have to pray through is how soon would we like to see our feet in the water of the Jordan.