“Getting Your Feet Wet”
Joshua 3:1-17
September 24, 2006

Introduction: Although I love to throw people in the pool, I confess I like to go in slowly, one baby step at a time. One time, after five minutes of fervent negotiation at the pool edge my Dad threw me in. How about you? Are you slow to warm, or do you jump in, with gusto and joy, doing a cannon ball dive into God’s grace? How can we enter into life confidently and joyfully by trusting God?

God Will Guide Us

Joshua 3 is an important chapter, because here we see Israel entering into the promises that God has been promising and preparing them for a long time. Our God is a God that does not always tell us how He will accomplish things, so that we have no choice but to fall on our faces before Him, in trust and in faith. Joshua tells Israel in 3:3-4, “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. Then you will know which way to go, since 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.” During their wilderness wanderings, Israel was led by the pillar of fire at night and the cloud by day. The ark reassured and reminded them of the daily and active presence of God with them and for them.

The ark was seen as the portable throne of the invisible God and contained the 10 Commandments and the book of the Covenant, as well as manna, which reminded them of the direction, teachings and provision of God. The ark was a visible sign and reminder of the presence of God, and that it is God who is bringing them into the fulfillment of all of His promises. As a result, they are called to keep their distance from the ark, for this way they can see where the ark is leading them, for this land is new to them, but not to God. It is God then who leads them and guides them over the river Jordan, and into their new life in Him. If we want to enter into the new life God has in store for us, we must keep our eyes and sight focused on Jesus. Jesus will lead us through choppy and dangerous waters, providing us with protection and direction. We need to trust and to follow Him, knowing that He is always with us and that He will guide us step by step as we trust in Him.
Getting Ready

Although ultimately it is God who accomplishes His will, God still expects us to get ready and to be prepared to follow Him, so we will be ready when He calls us to step out in faith. Joshua tells them in 3:5, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.” In the Old Testament, God gave specific and detailed descriptions of how they must prepare themselves for entering into His presence. They did so, for example, by washing their clothes, abstaining from sex and by laying aside earthly pleasures in order to focus on Him. God calls His people to holiness, in order that we reflect His character. As believers, we are to consecrate ourselves by daily coming before the cross of Jesus, seeking again and anew to be washed clean by His blood. We are to also seek to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We too can have a new life and make a new and fresh start in the Lord, if we are willing to lay aside all of the sins that so easily entangle us, and if we choose to set our sights on Jesus. We can only enter into the presence of God, if we are willing to be cleansed, restored and forgiven by Jesus.

Why do we get ready? Do we see, experience or expect amazing things from God? Do we expect too little from God? Or is our lack of faith and lack of trust interfering with our ability to see and to experience the power and grace of God all around us?

Getting Your Feet Wet

In preparing the people to cross the Jordan, the Lord is calling them to get their feet wet, to radically and completely trust in Him. Joshua says in 3:8, 13, “when you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord-the Lord of all the earth-set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will stand up in a heap.” In 3:14, we are also told that the waters were at flood stage all during the harvest. The Jordan River was normally a modest stream, but during this time, it was a raging torrent due to melted snow and spring rains. The river simply could not be forded by normal means. God then is calling them to take a leap of faith by getting their feet wet. The river will not be stopped up until they begin to wade in.

God wants us to be an abar people. Abar is the Hebrew word for crossing over. This verb occurs 21 times here, suggesting that this is a crucial moment for Israel, one that will define who they are and who God is. They are crossing over a boundary, one that will lead from old life to new life. Such abar times can be
frightening, as the land of Canaan was not an utopia, free of pain or suffering, fighting or anguish. We each have such moments in our own lives: job changes, illness, death, divorce or marriage. God wants us to be people who are willing to grow, to change, to claim new life and new territory. God wants us to know that even if the land is new to us, it is not new to Him. We have to take risks if we are to live a new life in Him. In our faith journey, we are either moving forward or backwards, and standing still is the same as moving backwards.

Let us get our feet wet, let us abandon ourselves to God, let us leap into His pool of new life unreservedly and with joy. Petra song Beyond Belief: We’re content to pitch our tent when the glory’s evident seldom do we know the glory came and went. Moving can seem dangerous in this stranger’s pilgrimage knowing that you can’t stand still, you cross the bridge. There’s a higher place to go, beyond belief; beyond belief, where we reach the next plateau, beyond belief; beyond belief. And from faith to faith we grow towards the center of the flow where He beckons us to go, beyond belief; beyond belief. Leap of faith without a net makes us want to hedge our bet waters never part until our feet get wet. There’s a deeper place to go where the road seems hard to hoe He who has begun this work won’t let it go. And it takes so long to see the change but we look around and it seems so strange we have come so far but the journey’s long and we once were weak but now we’re strong.