

Prep Time Is Never Wasted Time

by Michael Catt

The sermon emphasizes that preparation is essential for spiritual growth and obedience to God's calling in our lives.

Duration: 49:43

Scripture: Joshua 3:2, Joshua 3:14, Psalm 139:23-24, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 3:17, Ephesians 3:20

Topics: "Preparation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preparation in the Christian journey. He highlights the idea that how we practice is how we perform, and that a message is only as good as its preparation. The speaker also emphasizes the need for obedience and sacrifice in order to fulfill God's calling. The sermon references Joshua chapter 3, where the people are commanded to prepare provisions and follow the ark of the covenant as they prepare to possess the land God has given them.

Transcript

Amen. I'm glad somebody wrote a song that goes with the title of this series, Joshua chapter 3. What we're going to talk about tonight is that prep time is never wasted time. Preparation time is never wasted time.

I've heard Roger Breland say this a lot of times, that how you practice is how you perform. How you practice is how you perform. And a message is only as good as its preparation.

It might be easy in some ways to deliver a message, but it's hard to prepare one. And there's a difference between having a message in your head and a message on your heart. And that takes preparation time.

You see, waiting time is never wasted time in God's economy. Phillips Brooks, one of the great Christians of another time, was found pacing his office, and somebody came to him and said, what's wrong with you? He said, I'll tell you what's wrong with me. I'm in a hurry, and God's not.

If you read the Bible, God is never in a hurry. Sometimes He looks like He's late, but He's always on time. God is never in a hurry, but preparation is a part of the walk of faith.

If you want to plant seeds, you've got to break up the ground. If you're going to pray for rain, you better take an umbrella. If you want God to work, then you need to prepare your heart.

And God has always been in the preparation business. Whatever He does with your life or with mine, He has been preparing us through sermons and Bible studies and events and crisis, setbacks, adversity, trials, and failures to prepare us for what He has ahead for us. He did that with Noah.

He prepared Noah, and then Noah prepared the people to get ready, and only his family responded for the time of judgment. He did that with Moses. Moses' idea was, you know, I'll just kill off one Egyptian at a time.

At that rate, he'd still be trying to kill Egyptians. And God had to take him to the backside of the desert. And for 40 years, Moses was a forgotten man until he learned to listen and depend on God.

Joshua had to prepare by serving under Moses and by following Him and submitting to Him. He had to learn by being under the authority of Moses so that at one point, he would be ready to leave. Elijah prepared Elisha to take his mantle.

Jesus prepared His disciples for His ministry after He departed. And Paul prepared Timothy so that what he invested in Timothy would be imparted to others and to faithful men. God has always been in the preparation business.

And when I look at my own life, I see how God has prepared me. I see how sometimes I've resisted that preparation. I've wanted to take the easy road and the wide path.

And God's had for me a different path and a harder path sometimes. But God's always in the process of preparing us for what we must do, for where we must be, for how we must live and act and respond. You see, God works in us.

He works out of us and through us. But He has to work it in us first. When my mom died, my dad became a connoisseur of frozen TV dinners.

I mean, you could open the freezer and they'd just fall out. He had more three-year-old frozen tater tots than I've ever seen in my life. And it was all quick and easy.

But you see, what he missed was the preparation time of cooking a great meal. You can microwave a meal, but it doesn't taste like home cooking, does it? Right? Have you all eaten enough home cooking that you know that? I mean, it just doesn't taste like home cooking. You can pop it in that microwave and put it on high for two minutes and you can get it out, but it doesn't have the nutrition.

It doesn't have the flavor. It doesn't have the feel. It doesn't have the hands of love on it that make that meal special.

In a few days, we'll celebrate Thanksgiving. And moms and grandmothers and daughters and husbands will get out and carve turkeys and cook food and make everything, and we'll gobble it up. No pun intended.

We'll gobble it up in 20 minutes, what took hours to prepare. But the preparation is part of what makes it a special day, isn't it? Just gathering around and preparing and working and just putting it all together is part of what makes it special. And if you go back to Joshua chapter 1, if you remember in Joshua 1, God was preparing Joshua, and He talked to him.

Remember we talked about last week, the soles of your feet. Now, here's another little interesting fact about that, the soles of your feet, not shoes or sandals because free men wore sandals, but slaves did

not. So what He's saying is, if I'm your owner, then bare feet before me are a symbol of my presence and of the fact that you belong to me, and I'm the one that's going to guide your steps, and I'm the one that's going to lead you and take you down the path that you need to go.

So the first thing we want to see tonight is a time of preparation. Let's go back to Joshua 1, and then we'll move forward to Joshua chapter 3. Joshua 1 and verse 10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the midst of the camp, and command the people, saying, Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess it.

He said prepare provisions. He didn't say get a building committee together. He didn't say build a bridge.

He didn't say call in the seabees. He said prepare provisions for moving out. Why? Well, the manna was about to run out.

The food that was sufficient prepared by God in the wilderness for 40 years was about to be no more. And what was sufficient in the wilderness was not sufficient for the promised land. In the wilderness, they had food that showed up on the ground every morning for 40 years.

But in the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, they were going to have to learn to grow and prepare their own food because the manna was going to run out. This manna would no longer be needed, and it wouldn't be adequate for the promises and all the fullness of what God had for them in that new land. And so he says within three days, you're going to move out.

You know, I imagine there were some people saying, man, we've been waiting 40 years. Why do we have to wait three days? I want to give you three reasons why they waited three days. First of all, it was a time of contemplation.

It was a time of contemplation. Now why? Because that river was at flood stage. The river was at flood stage.

It wasn't dried out. It wasn't a drought. It was an impossible task to cross that river.

They couldn't build bridges back then, and it would have been impossible to go across that river. And what he wanted them to contemplate is this is impossible apart from God. If God doesn't intervene, we're going to drown.

Secondly, it was a time of verification. In chapter 2 of Joshua, they go in and verify that indeed the enemies of the Lord had been living in fear of the people of God, and the Lord had already delivered this land into their hands. They were just to go in and take it.

Thirdly, it was a time of decision. They had to decide. We're here.

We're on the border. We're right at the river. Are we going to make the same mistake that those before us made, or are we going to move forward in our faith? Ladies and gentlemen, in every one of our lives there's an intersection where we either make the turn that God wants us to make or we choose to go our own way.

And all of us are faced with intersection moments and decision times that affect the rest of our lives, that affect the course that we take, the decisions that we make, that affect our future and our faith. No decision

is insignificant when you're talking about how it affects the rest of your life. That's whether who you date or where you live or whatever you do or who you work for.

You better think about how that decision has a ripple effect. It's like throwing a rock into a pond. It's got a ripple effect all the way through your life.

And so here was a time of decision. In that time some people take the broad road and some people take the narrow road. Some people choose to obey and some people choose to disobey.

Some people choose the best and some people choose to settle for less than the best. And it is apparent from God's Word that God lets us choose the level of our blessings. We can obey and go in and take the land or we can disobey and stay and eat dust in the wilderness.

And if second best is what God's people want, that is exactly what He'll let them have. God has been called a gentleman. He forces Himself on no one.

If you want to settle for a carnal Christian life, God will let you settle for that. You'll pay the consequences for it. Your life will be wood, hay and stubble.

It'll just burn up, but God will let you settle for that. He's not going to force Himself on you. If you want to settle for only God's best, then God's going to put you in a position where you can get His best.

We just get to decide where we're going to be, on what level we're going to live with God. I have a lot of friends in ministry that have decided to live on the level of church politics and denominational politics. I went to the Georgia Baptist Convention this week.

I stayed as long as I could stay, and then I left. I just couldn't deal with it anymore. There's more back-slapping.

It looks like the Republican National Convention or the Democratic National Convention. When you go to one of those things, everybody's politic. Everybody went out and got their best suit and their best tie-on.

It's just blowing smoke. At some point you just walk away and say, you know what, I hope Jesus died for more than this. If what makes me significant is serving in a denominational leadership position, then my significance is not in Christ.

I've heard Warren Wiersbe say this a thousand times, I guess. There are no big churches, and there are no small preachers. There are just churches and preachers.

And some of my brethren in the ministry need to get over themselves and what they are and what positions they have. I've sat in meetings where they would read your resume introducing themselves to people that don't care. I listened to a guy introduce himself to Condoleezza Rice, and I'm thinking, this woman's got PhDs running out her ears, and she doesn't care.

She's going to get up and leave this meeting and go to the Oval Office. She doesn't care about your title. Make sure you put the title in front of my name.

Who cares? You see, you can choose to be successful in the world's eyes, or you can choose to be successful in God's eyes. You can choose to be impressive to men, or you can choose to be a person that is used by God. It's our choice.

By the way, if you read this account, and if you read the whole story of this, you remember that the tribe of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh came to Moses, and they said, Moses, we don't want to go over on the other side. We kind of like it on this side of the river, and how about you let us stay? And Moses said, well, you come fight with us for a while, and then you can come back, and you can settle over here on the wrong side of the river. Two and a half tribes said, we want to live on the wrong side of the Promised Land.

Now listen to me. They were the first people taken into captivity when the Assyrians came, because they decided to live on the wrong side of the river. By the way, we have members of this church and every church that decide to live on the wrong side of the river.

They decide they want to settle for carnality. They decide they want to settle for half-hearted commitment. They decide they want to just get as little as they can.

They want to get to heaven, but they don't want to do anything for God on earth, dying on the wrong side of the river. And guess what? They're the first people that the devil takes captive, because they're easy pickings. Kind of like when we were having a wild game banquet at Roswell Street one time, and we had a wild pig, and it roasted, and that big old pig was sitting on me.

He was huge. And somebody else asked Nelson Price, how did you shoot him? What did you shoot him with? He said, well, I just leaned over the fence, and I shot him in the pen. That's not hunting.

I mean, the thing was trapped. The pig didn't have a vote. That's not hunting.

Easy pickings, and that's what the devil does. He waits for somebody that says, I want to settle in living on a lower level than God has for me, and the devil says, I can get that one easy. It won't even take much.

Joshua chapter 1 and verse 5. No, chapter 3, I'm sorry. Chapter 3. Then Joshua said, The people, consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you. Chapter 3 and verse 7. Now the Lord said to Joshua, This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you.

Joshua magnified the Lord, and God used him. Don't you know Joshua wanted to do this? Moses had this staff, and so he'd take that staff, and he'd point it toward the water, and the water would part. Don't you know that Joshua wanted to ask Moses, Do you mind leaving me that staff? I might need to use it.

Turn it into a snake if I need to. I can strike a rock and water will come out. Do you mind holding it up? I've got all kinds of things I can do with that staff.

Do you mind leaving me that staff? Listen, here's the growth of God's revelation to his people. After 40 years in the wilderness, and Moses holding up that staff, God said to Joshua, You don't need a staff. Son, all you need to do is believe the promises that I've given you.

You just need the Word of God. You know what? A lot of us want crutches to lean on. We want something we can see and feel and taste and touch and smell.

We want some kind of crutch for God to give us, and all Joshua had was the promises of God. He said, Consecrate yourself. Sanctify yourself.

Set yourself apart. If you want to write by that 1 John 3 3, and everyone who has his hope fixed on him, purifies himself just as he is pure. Psalm 139 and verse 23, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. If you and I are going to take the land that God has for us, if we're going to be the people that God has called us to be, individually and collectively, then there is preparation and there is sacrifice and obedience that must take place in our lives. Secondly, a step of obedience.

Now look at chapter 3 and verse 2. Chapter 3 and verse 2. At the end of three days. Now how long did God say? Three days. At the end of three days, the officers went through the midst of the camp, and they commanded the people saying, When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, with the Levitical priest carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.

However, there shall be between you a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before. Verse 12.

Now then, take for yourselves twelve men of the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe, and it shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan. By the way, he's the Lord of all the earth, so the Jordan's not a problem for him. Did you catch that? If he's the Lord of all the earth, then a flooded river's not a problem for him, if he's the Lord of all the earth.

Are you with me? Okay, if you're with me, we can get through this quicker. Okay? He's the Lord of all the earth. Rest on the waters of the Jordan.

The waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap. Now, what was the basis of all of that? Every place the sole of your foot shall tread. You walk with God, you do what God tells you to do, you take the steps of obedience that God tells you to take, and I promise you, when the Jordan needs to be parted, it'll part.

God will do what he says he will do. And Joshua's given an opportunity to stand on the promises of God. And with that one step, 40 years of death and dying and defeat and manna was over.

One step of obedience. Oh, you and I have heard preachers say, oh, if you take the first step, God will help you. If you just take the first step, you know what? That's true.

That's true. If we just take one step of faith, God would show us that he's true to his promises. But we have to take the step of faith.

We have to get out of the wandering and defeat. What empowered them to do that? The Ark of the Covenant. Notice what it's called.

It's called the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God. Now, the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned 10 times in chapter 3 alone. What is significant about this command of God is that prior to this time, the Ark had been in the midst of the camp.

In the middle of the camp, in the tabernacle. Now, this Ark was going to lead them, and it was positioned in the front, and they were to be there looking at the Ark of the Covenant and finding their lead and taking their lead from the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant. God was going to lead them.

The Ark symbolized the presence of God. It symbolized everything about God, that his presence was going to go out before them, that they weren't walking into unknown land, that they were walking on ground that God had already been on. And symbolically for them, when those priests took that step into the water, God took that step into the water, and God went through that dry ground, and God came out on the other side.

So those millions of people that had walked in defeat could now say, man, if God can go through that and open that up, he can open it up for me. And he could do it for me. And so they walked in obedience.

Look at what he says. When you see the Ark set out. Isn't it amazing? He didn't say take a vote.

Put a committee together and see if you think that's really the Ark of God. No, he said when you see it, move out. Unquestioning obedience.

Why? He's talking to Joshua who was a soldier, and if anybody understands obeying orders, soldiers understand obeying orders. And we're soldiers of Christ, and we're supposed to obey our commander-in-chief without hesitation or reservation. And so he says, when you see it, set out.

Now, there's a little phrase in here that says, do not come near it. Why? Humility and reverence. They were to keep it at about three-quarter miles from the priests to the people, and I love how Ron Dunn describes this.

Ron Dunn says it's because if you were way back in the crowd and everybody was up on the Ark and all surrounding the Ark, you might not be able to see it because somebody too tall was in front of you, but when it was three-quarters of a mile ahead of you and you could see those priests carrying that Ark, it didn't matter where you were in the crowd. You're coming down that embankment toward that Jordan River, and I've been at that place, and the bank goes down here, and then the river levels out, and then it goes back up toward Jericho. When you go down in there, you can see that Ark way ahead of you, and you can go, there it is.

There it is. There's God. He's leading the way.

There's God. He's right out there in front of us. We're okay.

He's already made it across. You see, because when he was three-quarter miles ahead, before the first person ever had to set their foot in the water, the priest had already taken the Ark into the water, and it parted. So they knew God was true to his promises because they could look ahead of them and see it.

They could see God's faithfulness. He said, Don't treat it lightly. Don't crowd around it, and don't run ahead of God.

I lived twice in Oklahoma. I did mission work there. I told God if he ever wanted to punish me again, he could send me to Oklahoma.

About five years ago, one of the churches in Oklahoma that's notorious for being dead as a hammer called me and asked me if I would ever be interested in coming, and I said, I don't think so in this lifetime. But you know why Oklahomans are called Sooners? Well, you know why they are, don't you? Do you know why they're called Sooners? You don't know? When the government sent the Army out to guard the border of the Oklahoma Territory, the people that broke the law and slipped around the Army and went out and did

their land claims before it was legal were called Sooners. So Oklahoma was started by a bunch of lawbreakers.

And I've been in enough business meetings in Oklahoma, and I can tell you their descendants are still alive. And you can send this to anybody in Oklahoma you want to send it to, and they'll tell you they're still alive there. Some of them have moved to other states, but they're alive and well there.

I mean, what they do, they were lawbreakers. They would get out ahead and go around so that they could get a prime piece of property because they didn't obey the rules. Don't we do that with God sometimes? God gives us a promise, and we're going to run out ahead.

We're just going to take off and run out ahead of God and say, God, I don't have time to wait on you. I've got to get over there. Oh, there's a promised land.

Let's get going, and you'll get in there and drown. And you go, God, why did you abandon me? Why did you forsake me? God didn't abandon you. You got ahead of Him.

You started moving before He told you to. You didn't wait three days. You didn't do what He told you to do.

We tend to go out before we're sent. We have a tendency to act before we know. And then when we do, we get our eyes on the river instead of the Lord of the river.

And our eyes need to be on the Lord of the river, not on the river. And so God has put them in this situation. He says, now you wait three days, and when you see the ark, you set out.

And when you find a difficulty, you look for God in the middle of that difficulty. Don't look at the difficulty. Look for God in the middle of it.

God's always calling us to let Him set out and lead the way, and then we follow Him. He says, this is the way. Walk in it.

I will guide you with my eyes. The Word of God is a lamp and a light that guides us. He says, follow me.

The same Lord that said, follow me, is the one that said, my grace is sufficient for you. God's told us what to do. He's told us how to act.

And the ark symbolized the presence of God. And if that water didn't park, the ark was going to be gone, and everything inside it was going to be gone. And the Levitical priests were going to be gone.

All their leaders were going to be gone. And some of the first ones would drown. But that didn't happen, did it? Because God had prepared a way from that.

Now, look at that little phrase. You have not passed this way before. Can I tell you that we've never been here before as a church? Because today's a new day.

And tomorrow's a new day. We've seen some things in the last few months that are just absolutely, totally, 100% of God. I mean, you'd have to be blind as you could be and not see what God's done in this place.

We've baptized more people since the first of September than we've baptized in some years. Just in two and a half months. God has moved and done things in our lives.

We've seen answer to prayers through those forums that have been on the front. We've seen people praying more. We've seen the hours in the prayer ministry going up.

We've seen a lot of things that God's been doing in our midst. But we've never been here before. And so we have to keep our eyes on the Lord that we don't run ahead of Him or lag behind Him.

The danger for us is twofold, folks. The danger is that we would get ahead of God and try to tell God how it needs to work. Or that we would get behind Him and lag behind and not obey Him and miss where He's trying to take us.

And He gets out of sight on us. Alexander McLaren said it this way, God often opens His hand by one finger at a time and leaves us face to face with some plain but difficult duty without letting us see the helps to its performance till we need to use them. If we go right on the road which He has traced out, it will never lead us into a blind alley.

The mountains will open up before us as we come near what looked like an impassable wall and some narrow gorge or other, wide enough to run a track through but not wide enough to be noticed before we are close to it, will be sure to open. Now listen to the last sentence of this quote. The best security for tomorrow's wonders is today's sanctifying.

The best security for tomorrow's wonders is today's sanctifying. We get right with God today and God can do wonders among us tomorrow. This is a faith journey.

This is a faith journey. Anniversaries and birthdays mark recurring events on our calendars. Keith talked about the young lady who was baptized being saved on the same day that he was ten years ago.

And we mark anniversaries and we mark birthdays on the calendar of our lives but there are God moments that need to mark our lives too. Moments when we've seen God come through. That's why you ought to keep a journal.

That's why you ought to write notes about things that happen that are significant because you'll have a tendency to forget what God has done. And a crisis will come and you'll wonder, Oh, will God come through for me? And then you start looking back and say, He came through there. Listen, I've forgotten things that God did six weeks ago if I don't write them down.

I'm in an age where I forget what He did today. But when I write them down, I remember great is the faithfulness of God. Every day He's faithful to us.

You see, we need to remember these God moments that cannot be repeated and they cannot be forgotten. When we do refresh this next year, it's not going to be the same as this year because God's not into somebody calling in the hotline and requesting that song again. It'll be different.

And the danger for us, folks, let me just talk to family here for a minute, the danger for us is that we feel like if we've done something one way one time, we've got to do it that way every time. If we stood up on that song one time, we've got to stand up on that song every time. It may not hit you the same the second time as it hit you the first time.

It may be five times for now that it blows you away and it didn't even get you the first time. You see, Baptists are notorious about getting into ruts. Certain songs we'll always clap after.

You know, nobody ever claps after the Scripture reading. Have you ever noticed that? We clap after a song written by men and nobody ever claps after the Word of God's written. Man, God, that's a great word.

That's great. I love the Word of God. That is wonderful.

We don't ever do that. Now, don't start doing it every time I read the Bible now. Listen, this is the walk of faith.

This is the flow of the Spirit that comes out of us that we don't have to do it like we've always done it and we don't have to repeat it the same way. Or somebody says, Oh, well, they must not have liked that song this time because they didn't stand up. It's okay.

Is it okay, choir? Is it okay, Mark? It's okay. We're not robots that react by a computer program. We are people of faith that react according to the movement of God in our lives.

And there are moments sometimes when you may be the only one that wants to stand up on a song and say, God, yes! And don't you stand up just because the person next to you is standing up. You're not responding to men. You're to respond to God.

And if God doesn't prompt you to stand up, sit yourself down. But if God tells you to stand up, stand up. Don't respond to men.

Worship God. Because there are moments that will mark you when God moves in on you and does something in you that you just can't get over. You need to mark it on your calendar.

Those times when God's grace seems to flood your life, when God refreshes you, when God does something in you that is unique and different, cherish the moment. Drink from the fountain. Let the stream of blessing flow all over you.

Don't miss it. But don't come back the next Sunday and ask God to repeat it. Because that's not walking by faith.

Now, did you hear what I said? I didn't say you can't stand up. Does everybody understand that? I just want to make... Because somebody will leave here and say, He said we can't stand up. He's mad because we've been standing up.

I'm not mad because... No! Okay? I'm just saying, whatever you do, it better be the Lord that prompts you to do it, not the people around you. This is not a pep rally where we've got cheerleaders in front trying to get us revved up. This is worship of a living God.

And sometimes, rather than standing up, we need to fall down on our face and get before God and say, God, I can't believe that your grace is that good for me. You see, sometimes we don't need to say amen. Sometimes we need to say, oh me.

And sometimes we don't need to applaud. We need to be still and let God be God. And just allow ourselves to get in the moment with the Lord.

There are some times when I can't do anything in my response to God, but just sit there and go, wow. That's the most biblical word I can think of at the moment. It's just, wow, that God could do that.

That God is that good. That God allowed me to experience that and to be a part of that. It's just phenomenal.

And sometimes I want to jump up and down and scream and shout, and sometimes I'm riding down the car and people think I'm fighting with the devil or something. I don't know. I'm just riding.

I'm just having a great time. And sometimes I'm just riding, and I'd be oblivious to anything, including the police officer that's behind me, because I'm focused on the moment. Folks, don't get ahead of God and miss the moment that he has for you.

And don't come back and ask God to repeat the moment because that may be something for that time and that moment in your life that he'll never repeat again, but you can stand on it and build on it. You need to remember it. Finally, a life of surrender, a life of surrender.

Joshua 4, they put up memorial stones in the Jordan River where the priests stood on dry ground. So that the priests would have a witness and the people would have a witness for generations to come that God had been in their midst. And God puts these stories in the Bible and tells us we're not without a witness.

There are memorial stones put there. So that when your children say, what do these stones mean? You say, well, I'll tell you, this is what God did in our midst. Folks, you need to have memorial stones in your family and in your faith where you tell people what God did.

I know some of you probably get tired of me talking about Vance Havner and talking about Ron Dunn and other people, but I want to tell you, they're memorial stones for me. And people ask me, why do you do what you do and why do you preach the way you preach? It's because I can look back in my life at some memorial stones that were put down where God worked in my heart in ways that I can't get over. In Joshua chapter 5, the people are safely across.

They've established new boundaries in the promised land. And the next thing is Jericho. Another impossibility.

Boy, you know, man, wow. I sure am glad we got across that Jordan River. Boy, I was wondering about that water for a minute.

Oh boy, I'm glad we're across there. Wow, look at the walls on that city. They'd never seen a walled city before.

They'd been living in tents all their life. The only people that had seen this city had been Joshua and Caleb. And now they're facing this city, and look at Joshua 5, 13.

Now it came about that when Joshua was beside Jericho that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man who was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, Are you for us or are you for our adversaries? And he said, No. Rather, I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.

And Joshua fell on his face on the earth and bowed down and said to him, What has my Lord to say to his servant? And the captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, Remove your sandals. There we go again. Take your shoes off.

Remove your sandals from your feet. For the place where you are standing is holy, and Joshua did so. Joshua was standing there and he's walking around.

Suddenly he realizes he's not alone. And he turns around. Have you ever been somewhere and you thought you were alone and all of a sudden you realized you weren't? And suddenly he realizes he's not alone.

And he turns around and there's a soldier there with a sword drawn. And Joshua says to him, Are you on our side or their side? And the captain of the Lord of hosts says to him, I did not come to take sides. I came to take over.

Listen, folks, God's not on anybody's side but God's side. And if you're on God's side, you're on the right side. If you're not on God's side, you're on the wrong side.

God's only on one side. God's not on the side of Baptists. God's not on the side of Pentecostals.

God's not on the side of Catholics. God's only on one side. God's on the side of those who are on the side of Jesus.

And the captain of the Lord of hosts is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. And he comes to take over. He says, Joshua, now you're in charge of the people, but now I want you to understand I'm in charge.

I'm the one that's going to lead all of this out. I'm not here to take sides. And Joshua immediately fell to his feet.

A soldier before his captain. Why? He didn't draw his sword out and say, Well, let's see who's really in charge. He surrendered to his captain.

He surrendered to his captain. He realized who was really in charge. And the commander only gave him one command.

Remove your sandals. Recognize whose presence you're in. Realize who you're talking to.

You see, it's not enough to recognize the presence of God. We have to also practice the presence of God. And he wants them to remove his sandals and have worship.

And remember, he's talking about every place that your soul has tread. He's been knowing the promises of God. Now he's going to have to live in the promises of God.

And so Joshua comes to this moment, and the captain of the Lord of hosts is there. And his presence there tells Joshua this. Everything you need to take these walls down, I've already provided.

I'm already sufficient for you. His presence brings his power. Now turn, if you would, quickly to Ephesians 3. Ephesians 3, verse 14.

Ephesians 3, verse 14. By the way, while you're turning there, if you ever get in a tiff with somebody, I know you never do that. I've done that.

But I mean, if you ever get crossways with somebody, anybody ever get crossways with somebody? You know, you just... And you know what we do. We go and we try to get people around us who agree with us

so they'll be on our side. Folks, let me tell you something.

In the church, there's only one side. And there's God's side. And right is right and wrong is wrong.

End of discussion. And if it's right, it's always right. And if it's wrong, it's always wrong.

End of discussion. And if we could ever get Christians to quit trying to figure out whose side everybody's going to be on and everybody just humble themselves before God and get on God's side, we'd be in a whole lot better shape than our churches today. Whole lot better shape.

So Ephesians 3, verse 14. For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its form and its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power. Now this is what Paul is praying for us.

This is what Paul is asking God to do. That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Look at all these alls in this passage.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. Now go back up to verse 17.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts. How are you going to walk in power? How are you going to walk before God in victory? How are you going to keep God out of your head and not run ahead from God? That Christ may dwell in your hearts means that Christ may settle down or to make Himself at home in your heart. How does Christ settle down and make Himself at home in your heart? By spending time with Him.

So that, and understand I'm not saying this with any irreverence, so that you and God are comfortable in an intimate relationship and you're not talking to each other like strangers. So that all the power may flow through you. You see, when I practice the presence of God, when I prepare my heart for God to speak to me, then He can settle down and make Himself at home in my life.

Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. You see, I don't need more of the Spirit, but the Spirit needs more of me. And He needs more of me for three reasons. He needs more of me so that He can control me.

He needs more of me, secondly, so He can cleanse me. And thirdly, He needs more of me so that I can be conformed to His image. Because if He is not controlling me, and if He's not cleansing me, and if He's not conforming me to His image, then I'm going to get out ahead of Him, and I'm going to make some mistakes.

And I'm going to do some things and wonder why God didn't bail me out. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 10. So that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Verse 11. So that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. Look at what he's saying.

When I yield to God, when I allow Him to control me, when I prepare my heart to be ready for what He has for me in the future, then the life of Jesus is manifested in my mortal body. People can look at our lives, listen to what we say, watch the way we respond to life and to crisis, and say, that person's got something I don't have. That person acts like Jesus acts, and talks like Jesus talks, and lives like Jesus would live if He were here.

And so here's the only question you've got to have. Go back to Joshua chapter 3. And then we're going to sing. Joshua chapter 3 and verse 14.

When you open your Bible to read it, you ought to ask this question before you start reading it. Joshua 3 verse 14. What has my Lord to say to His servant? That's a good way to start reading the Bible.

Lord, this word is thousands of years old. What do you have to say to me? You see, you've acknowledged two things. First of all, you've acknowledged that He's Lord.

So in other words, you're not going to argue with Him. And secondly, you've acknowledged that you're a servant, which means you're going to obey what He says to you. And I promise you, if you'll prepare your heart that way, that you say, now Lord, you're in charge.

What you say, I'll do. I'm not going to argue. I'm going to obey.

I'm going to respond in the way that you want me to respond. I promise you, when you do that, He'll speak to you. And then by practice, and practicing the presence of God on a daily basis, you'll begin to see when He's telling you to walk and when He's telling you to wait.

Make sense? So tonight, before you go to bed, or in the morning when you get up, whenever you have your time along with Lord, just say, Lord, what do you have to say to your servant? What a great acknowledgement. And what a great opportunity to watch God work in your life. Listen, you've never been where you're going to be this next week.

You've not passed this way before. You don't know what's ahead. So you need the Lord to speak to you so that you know when He speaks to you whether you need to get going or whether you need to wait.

Whether you need to move out or whether you need to make provisions and preparations because you don't move until God moves. And you don't speak until God's told you to speak. You don't act until God's told you to act.

But when He does, move out. What does the Lord have to say to His servant? The altar is going to be open. We're going to sing.

And if you want to come down and pray at any time during this service, you can come down and pray. At the end of our time of worship and singing, I'll ask for those who are going to be presented to come down. So you don't need to worry about doing that right now.

I just want you to worship with us right now. And let's stand together. And let's just sing and worship the Lord right now.

Okay?

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