

Joshua 3:7-17
November 5, 2023

Crossing

“Let us know when it is time for the, “crossing of the Red Sea!” It was the adults. We were gathered for Easter. The children were all watching, “The Ten Commandments,” the Hollywood epic by Cecile B. Demille with Charlton Heston as Moses. The grownups didn’t want to watch the whole story, just the special affects at the Sea. Depicting a crossing on dry ground was a cinematic challenge (for which the movie won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects).

For most of the time human beings have been on this earth, *actual* crossings, *wet or dry*, have been challenging. Before human beings had learned to build boats, crossing from one side of a body of water to the other was an overwhelming endeavor, made even more difficult if children and the elderly and all the possessions had to be carried along (I am assuming they knew how to swim, although one can imagine that swimming was not a universal skill).

Even small streams could become great obstacles, and many miles might have to be traveled to find a shallow place people could ford, both safely and quickly. It is no surprise that one group of people fleeing from another would be terrified by the presence of a large body of water to trap them.

Nowadays, we have bridges which can transport people and freight over bodies of water in minutes or

seconds when it used to take days or weeks. I sometimes think of this when I drive to St. Louis, and there are signs that give the names of rivers too small to even notice, which lacking a bridge, would be an ordeal to cross.

When I moved to Delaware eight years ago, I remember driving to the east side of town without realizing that I had crossed the Olentangy River, which is only a blip, and not an obstacle at all. And it is also not that different in size from the Jordan River near Jericho, where Joshua led the Israelites across into the land which had been promised to their forefathers hundreds of years before.

In New Testament times, the crossing at Jericho was very commonly used because it gave travelers a way to avoid Samaria, or journey to the east, and doesn’t seem to have caused anyone very much concern.

Joshua’s crossing to enter the land is the opposite bookend of the crossing that led the people of Israel out of Egypt, known, of course, as the Crossing of the Red Sea, depicted in the movie.

For modern people, the crossing of the Jordan River on the way in is lesser known than the Exodus on the way out of Egypt. But it may not be less significant, especially for Joshua, who followed Moses as the leader of the people after Moses died and was buried up in the mountains to the east.

Succeeding Moses was not an easy thing for anyone to do, and according to the Book of Joshua, the crossing was one of the ways the Lord exalted Joshua in the eyes of all the people; the crossing on the way in to Canaan was as important and miraculous as the crossing had been on the way out of Egypt. But this time it was Joshua who led it.

You may remember back at the beginning of the journey through the wilderness. Moses sent twelve spies into the land to scout things out, and ten of them came back to claim that there was no way they could conquer it. Only *Joshua* and Caleb thought otherwise.

The Lord punished the people for this failure of faith with forty more years in the wilderness. Joshua's faith resulted in his becoming the successor to Moses as the leader of the Israelites, and the one who would take them across the Jordan River, the final leg of the journey from captivity to freedom, and he would lead them *on dry ground*, that would be the spectacle.

So much has the crossing of bodies of water captured the human imagination that the idea has become a poetic synonym for salvation. In the popular mind, there is no doubt that the crossing of the Red Sea is first in the common consciousness. But it is the Jordan crossing that has become a metaphor of the entrance into heaven.

In the words of an old spiritual:

Roll, Jordan, roll, roll, Jordan, roll,
I want to go to heaven when I die,
To hear old Jordan roll.

For the people enslaved in America, crossing the Jordan River stands for being set free, but at the other end of the journey, not the journey out of captivity, but the journey into freedom, not the journey out of Egypt, but the journey into Canaan. Not the wilderness, but the gateway into heaven itself. Earthly life can be seen as the journey in the wilderness between the Exodus and the final consummation.

So when we read this text beneath its literal meaning, it is almost impossible to see it apart from the idea of final transition from earthly into eternal life, which has already begun in present reality, but is not yet completed. In our earthly lives, we move towards and anticipate the completion of life.

Having been made in God's Image, and born into this real world, we find that we are at odds with ourselves at the deepest levels of our being, at odds with God. We know that we have not been made to pursue selfish ends, to disregard the well-being of any of our neighbors, the world's people; rather to be caring, and kind, to apply the love of neighbor to everyone we meet, in every facet of life. Yet we live in the knowledge of our failures; failures of faith and love. Sometimes more evidently than in other times, the world in its pain reminds us of these failures as well.

Though we have accepted reconciliation in Christ Jesus, and anticipate a complete transformation of life, we still live under the old regime, as it were. Part of the experience of grace is in terms of hope, the anticipation that the work that God has begun in us will be brought to perfection.

We carry this hope around in us. We express it through every good thing we do; every sacrifice we make, every service and offering we give; every kindness, compassion, every act of courage. Sometimes we carry this hope around in us, just by *bearing some of the world's pain*.

It helps to visualize it and one of the strong scenes is that of crossing the river into heaven where all the strands of our lives and of the world's life come together and are woven into a tapestry of harmony and peace and love, so distinct from much present experience.

When I started out the journey of this message, I thought I was talking about the crossing that is most overlooked set next to the exodus crossing, which gets such great attention. Then it began to be clear that this crossing of the Jordan led by Joshua, also lies deep in the consciousness of the faithful, and points us ahead to the fulfillment of life.

It also helps to sing it. Before we share Communion, we will sing it out in one of our hymnal's hymns about the River Jordan, I am bound for the promised land. But first, let us pray.

Slavery and the SBC

Galatians 3:28

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6:5-9

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Revelation 18:11-1

11 "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore — 12 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every

sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble;
13 cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.

The Baptist Story - The end of the Triennial Convention and the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The meetings in 1841 and 1844 - the decision not to decide at the convention level, the decision to ban slaveowners at the Home Mission Society level.

The danger of moral superiority - slavery was endemic, we imagine moral inferiority - slavery was abolished, we imagine moral superiority.

Both conclusions are inaccurate and unhelpful - they blind us from present and future failures - the depersonalization of relationships in the modern world.

4 things:

- 1 - More southern than northern baptists, but northern more represented
- 2 - Home missions v. Foreign missions, western expansion in south neglected
- 3 - Societal method v. Convention method

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