

Date of sermon: 2/27/2022
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Joshua 3:1-17
Title of Sermon: It's a Good Thing You've Got Problems
Series: Courageous Living in a Dangerous World

3 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. **2** After three days the officers went throughout the camp, **3** giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. **4** Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it." **5** Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." **6** Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them. **7** And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. **8** Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. **10** This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. **11** See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. **12** Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. **13** 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 be cut off and stand up in a heap." **14** So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. **15** Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, **16** the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. **17** The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Okay -- let's imagine God calls you and says, "Hey -- I'm gonna give you an opportunity to eliminate" -- whatever you want -- birds, animals, insects -- whatever that you just think, "It's not needed, God." What would you pull off the face of the earth? What kind of things? I heard "mosquitos" -- yes. I'll tell you in a minute how I got rebuked in the first service for that one, but -- flies. They serve no good purpose. And if you have one, please keep it to yourself. I don't think they serve any good purpose.

There was this one pastor. He was preaching, and this fly was kind of annoying him a little bit, and he was coming down right there on his Bible. And he would be preaching, kinda look over here, distract people -- hit -- like that. He was trying to be coy, and -- then about the second time -- hit -- and then he just paused. "Life would have been a whole better if Noah would've wiped those two things out on that ship." The reality is, flies. I don't think they serve one good purpose. I'm not sure why. I know when I get to Heaven, God's gonna tell me, and I'll go, "Oh, I never knew that." I thought, to be honest with you, mosquitos. I mean, they are the

Minnesota national bird. They are a pain in the neck. But one dear brother said they actually pollenate cocoa plants. And it's like -- I hate chocolate. And then I asked him, I said, "Well dear brother, can you explain to me why -- we don't have any cocoa plants in Oregon, why did God need to bring us mosquitos?" I don't think they serve any good purpose. One dear little friend from last night, he said, "Pastor, can you get rid of skunks?" Yeah. And then, killer hornets. That was another one that got nominated after the first service. People got all excited, so whatever you've got today, bring it on. I think those things are just simply not needed. Now. Understand what I'm saying. I'm not suggesting that they alter our lives horribly. They're just kind of a nuisance. But there are things in life that, because of the way they kind of annoy us, can get under our skin.

That's what I think the Jordan issue is. The Nation of Israel has been brought out of Egypt 400 years in slavery, 40 years on a nice little hike. Moses is dead. They cross the Red Sea. I mean, they took on some huge things! But now they've got this little river. It snakes down through -- yes, during the flooding season -- which is the harvest season. It can be about a mile wide in some places, but not here at Jericho. It's an inconvenience. But -- I've seen inconveniences have horrific outcomes. I've seen couples that -- their life was busy. Busyness is an inconvenience. It's not the end of the world -- it's just busyness. And if busyness gets unchecked over time, the next thing you know, that couple's not spending time together, they're not taking little walks and holding hands, they're not sitting on the back on the swing, you know, sipping their sweet tea. They're not doing those things. Why? Because they're busy. And the next thing you know, that busy couple starts to be like two ships passing in the night. And pretty soon they don't communicate very well, and everything's kind of an agitation, and they've created a culture in their home that is kind of antagonistic. It's not huge -- no affair, no big gargantuan problem, no financial debt that's killing them. But sometimes small things, kind of like a fly, if not handled well in relationship can become -- well, it can sink the ship.

I've seen people in churches. The first service -- "Too early, Pastor. Saturday night, I, you know, I go to bed by 7:30, and Sunday morning, the 10:30 service -- well, it's just so many people. It just annoys me." And the next thing you know, they just keep using excuses. They're small. They're not deal-breakers. Statisticians -- kind of, experts, tell me that, in this last two and half years, church attendance across the United States has decreased by 50 percent. I know a number of friends in town -- 25 percent what they used to be, 35 percent what they used to be, 50 percent what they used to be. What caused all of that? A virus. Now -- no, I'm not in the camp that thinks it's just the flu -- I got this thing, twice. And if you think it's just like a flu -- well, I'd just as soon that you have my kind of COVID, and you'll probably repent. Reality is, I take it very seriously. But at the end of the day, we've allowed in our culture, the US -- by God's grace, not our church -- but in our culture, a virus, racial tensions, and all kinds of other issues. We've allowed them to sideline 50 percent of people that used to attend, participate, and serve in their local church. Sometimes little obstacles have big impacts.

That's what Joshua was facing. It was an obstacle. But as he teaches us, these obstacles, if we have the eyes of faith, can become opportunities for us to ponder. Not devastating -- opportunities. And that's what God wanted for this nation. He tells them in this text that God parked them for three days right here at the Jordan. I don't know why three days. Glad it wasn't 30. But for three days, God wanted the waters of the Jordan to just rush past them, and He wanted them to take many trips to the -- you can do that in three days. You just kind of go up to the river, you look at it and think, "Yup, it's not going anywhere. Yup. Joshua, how we gonna get past this?" "Don't know." "Joshua, only got a couple million people back here. What are you gonna do?" "I'm not so sure." And God parks them there. And I think that God does that a lot of times in your life and mine. He just kind of takes you up to the obstacle, doesn't solve it, and just lets you look at it every day. And there's one of two things that can happen when you stare at that obstacle. You can get really mad. Sometimes you can get kind of -- oh, you know, you gotta act, you gotta do something. And quite frankly, sometimes you can just turn around and walk away.

Let's remind ourselves who we're dealing with. This is the Nation of Israel. They were in slavery for 400 years, then they took a nice long trip -- hike -- for 40 years. Then their number one lead man, Moses, dies. And Joshua has never been in this kind of place before in his life, ever. It's not that he wasn't a leader. He was a warrior. He's never been number one. He's never dealt with the personal defection of people who, when he went up and met with God, came down and they had a bunch of idols built. He's never dealt with a group of people who pleaded for you to die so that they could get another leader. He's never dealt with a group of people that he has sacrificed for, loved, and was willing to put his life on the line for them, and to have them say, "You led us out here to die. I want to go back to Egypt." He's never been there before. And for three days, they parked it right in front of the Jordan. And God let the waters well up.

Obstacles are opportunities for people of faith. But if you're going to overcome those obstacles, Joshua needs to teach us something, because they did overcome them. They entered into the promised land, and it's no small feat. How did he do it? Number one, he tells you that if you're going to overcome an obstacle, then you gotta get ready to move. You're never going to move into the promised land if you stay on this side of the Jordan. You're never going to do it. You're not going to experience what God has for you if you planted. So therefore, you have to be ready to make external adjustments. That's what is required of us. After three days, the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people, "When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God and the priests and the Levites carrying it, then you will know which way to go, and you need to get up and prepare yourself to move."

The fact is -- God is always asking us to move. Not necessarily from one address to another, but from one place in our Christian life to another. What you needed three years ago is not what you need today. The faith that our church, the ministries that

our church had three or four, five years ago, they were marvelous for the time, but we need different things. Why? Because God's always growing a church. He's always leading a people. He's always transforming a people. The biblical term is sanctification -- making one become more like Christ. And Paul said -- Paul said it this way: "I want to forget what lies behind. I want to forget 19-whatever. The year 2015, 2020. I need to forget that. So that I can take hold of that which God has taken hold of for me."

It's an attitude more than anything. Why? Because you cannot stay where you are and go on with God. You can't do that. It's impossible for you to stay put. It's impossible for you to remain the same person and to acquire or to receive the things that God has for you. Your family has to be changing. Your spirit has to be changing. Your marriage has to be changing. Why? Because it's gonna take new faith, it's gonna take developed faith, it's gonna take a different maturity for you to face the things in the future than what you have today. If you think for a moment -- or if we think as a church that we have everything that we need to face anything that comes along, then we're fooling ourselves just like the Nation of Israel. There's no way that they can acquire the promised land staying on the wrong side of the river -- they gotta move. Well, how do we get there, God? How do we become those different kinds of people? How do we prepare ourselves to move?

Joshua tells us that the external changes that need to come always come from internal growth. They do. You don't wake up in the morning and say, "Man, I'm gonna take hold of life and I'm gonna change." No, something happened. Joshua tells the people -- he says in verse 5, "Tell the people, consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." Now, what does that term mean? We know it means, just by simple definition, to consecrate means to be made holy, to be set apart.

I've noticed something in the Christian life -- it's pretty habitual. We are all really good on the idea that we're saved by grace. We get that. We quote Ephesians 2:8 and 9 all the time. "Saved by grace, not of ourselves, it's the free gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast." We nail that one. And by and large, I think the gospel is received that way. Here's where we alter, a lot of us. We're saved by grace -- and we think we have to earn the rest of it. So, we use language like, "Do you take sin seriously?" Well, what does that mean? "Are you fighting sin in your life?" "Are you doing those kinds of things?" And sometimes we go back to words like this -- consecrate. What does it mean? To make one holy. My friends, you never made yourself holy for one minute. God did. You didn't set yourself apart -- God did. You didn't identify the gifts that you're going to receive -- God made that decision. You didn't establish the ministries that you're currently leading -- God did those things. So the idea of consecration is, we've got to take sin seriously and get rid of it. You never have taken sin that seriously! Why? Because you can't do it! You don't got the chops to deal with sin -- that's why Jesus went to the cross. You don't have the ability to deal with sin.

So, what does it mean to consecrate myself? To become internally ready so that I'm externally prepared to move? Can I suggest two words -- number one is remember. Remember what God has done. It is God who has set you apart. It is God who indwelt you through the power of the Holy Spirit and gifted you and sealed you and gave you the ministry that you're currently leading. It is God who has a plan for your life. It is God. Paul says, "I want to take hold of that which God has taken hold of for me." To consecrate myself is to not go out and do something first and foremost, but it's to remember, "God, what have you done?" The Nation of Israel was not chosen because of their good looks -- they were chosen because God made a sovereign choice. God chose the Israelites -- He didn't choose the Ammonites. He didn't choose the Canaanites. He chose the Israelites. We don't know why -- He'll inform us when we get to Heaven. And until then, He just expects us to accept it. So, to consecrate themselves, to make themselves holy, God is the one who made them holy, God is the one who set them apart. And God does the same thing to you. Remember.

Number two is permission. And that is, permission to God -- "Lord, I want you to do in my life what only you can do, so that I'm prepared to serve however you desire me to serve. God, take out of my hands that which is not pleasing to you. Get rid of it. Extract it out of my heart. Get it out of my life. Take out of my hands that which is not pleasing to you and place into my hands that which is pleasing to you, so that I might" -- what? Fulfill the will of the Father. Consecrate yourself.

A number of years ago when Kerri and I were leading in a different church, we all noticed -- no one was coming to Christ, baptism was never used, church wasn't growing. It was as flat as the Mohave Desert. And God led me to pray this prayer: "Holy Spirit, come and do in our midst what only you can do so that we might fulfill the will of the Father." I had no idea how earth-shattering that simple prayer would become. "Holy Spirit, come and do in our midst what only you can do." Over the next year, 50 percent of my entire leadership team, staff and elders, all resigned because of moral failure. We were actually afraid to come to church, afraid who was going to be exposed. Afraid who was going to have to confess. We'd go to elder meetings, and I remember one time one of the men said, "Pastor, when does this stop?" and I said, "I have no idea." The idea of consecration is that you've got to get serious. You can't. But what you can do is to remember what God has done. And what you can do is to give God permission. You say, "Why do I have to give God permission?" Because I've noticed something in Scripture. God chooses to work with faith. And in fact, the Scripture says that He's limited when He can't find faith.

Jesus came up to Peter and said, "Peter, I want to wash your feet." And Jesus didn't say, "I don't care what you decide to do, Peter -- I'm gonna wash your feet." He didn't say that. He said, "Peter, would you let me wash your feet." You see, Christ even, in our lives -- I know God sovereignly at times does things apart from us, but the reality is, for most of us, including the Nation of Israel, you go consecrate yourself, you get ready. The implication is this -- if you don't do it, we're not going to

enter into the promised land. God has sovereignly chosen when Christ is going to come back. You and I don't have anything to do with it. God has sovereignly chosen how He's going to save people -- it's through the blood of Jesus Christ. But frequently in this -- and this can be frightening -- God is looking for permission, He's looking for faith. He's looking for the person who's willing to say, "Father, take out of my hands that which is not pleasing to you and place into my hands those things that are pleasing to you so that I to your glory might fulfill the will of the Father."

First time I ever prayed that prayer, I was scared to death. Petrified that God would take too much out. Find too much dirt. But my friends, if you want to get ready to move, if you want to take hold of that which God has taken hold of for you, then I would imagine all of us need to give God permission. Search me. And do that change in me.

Paul said it this way -- 2 Timothy 2 -- "So, if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, you will be a special instrument. You will be set apart, useful to the Master. Prepared for every good work." Get ready to move, because what this city needs from this church is not what we were three years ago. We need to be different. And what this city needs from you, and what your family needs from you is not who you were three years ago. You need to be different. And you're never going to fully enter into the anointing of God and the work that God has unless you're ready to move.

And when you make that decision, there's another one you have to make, and that is -- listen. Joshua said to the Israelites -- verse 9 -- "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that He will certainly drive out before you all of these people. Listen to Him!" Why? Because God is going to give you the path of walking through this. And be prepared to listen to Him, especially when God seems slightly off-kilter or weird. And He's gonna! Think about it! Joshua was a fighter. That guy's entire career with his best friend Caleb. They knew how to fight, they knew how to go to war, they knew how to lay their life on the line, they knew how to spy, they knew how to go into risky situations. And the last thing that Joshua, a warrior for God, would ever say to the pastors -- "Hey, you pastors! We're gonna be a thousand yards behind you. You go into the water first." And, "Hey, pastors! We want you to go in with the ark." "By the way, the cities are fortified over there, and there's all kinds of soldiers, and some huge giants. But tell you what -- you guys know how to pray, and you really know how to sing. So go get 'em!"

That's exactly what God told them. "I want you to take the box that's called the Ark, and I want you to give it to the priests, and I want them to march down. And by the way, I want all of your soldiers -- Joshua, that includes you. I want you a thousand yards back. That's ten football fields. That's far enough that if they get in trouble, you can't help 'em. I want you ten football fields back from those guys. I want them to step out, and I want them to put their feet in the water." "Oh, man, God, that'll do it! I've seen pastors walk into lakes and it just -- it splits every day! It's

normal!" There's not a thing that God says that makes sense. And God says to him -- "Listen." Why? "Joshua, you've never been here before. It's not that you're clueless, but you're clueless. You've never been here before. You don't know what it means to lead these people. By the way, you don't know the path. You don't know where I want you to cross. You don't know anything about this. And so, therefore, Joshua, and this is what I want to do, Joshua."

In verse 7 He tells him, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all of Israel so that they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses." What's God saying? "Today, Joshua, I want your people, when they see you, I want them to respect you, I want them to follow you, just like they did Moses. And the only way we're going to do that," God says to Joshua, "is if you let me take the lead. If you let me take the lead, I will validate you, I will esteem you before your people, and I will give you the ability to lead them for your entire life, but you have to listen to me." I think God's still doing the same thing today, my friends. God has a plan. Sometimes it doesn't make sense. Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes God takes you right up to the Jordan and He parks you there. And He says, "I want to lead you."

Young couple I know, they were praying, "God, would you give us a safe place to live." And the next answer God gave them is, "You're going to lose the very house you're living in." "Lord, that's not a good answer. How about if you give us a place that we're going to move before we find out that we're getting kicked out. Lord, here's our budget and here's the demand." God leads them right up to the Jordan and He parks them there. And He sends them an email -- "By the way, the very place you're living, you're going to lose in two months."

They have some challenges. Not just finances. They have other challenges in their life. And they're scared. And it feels like not only is God not speaking to them, but God is allowing a lot of things that are frightening. And in that moment, as I was sitting with them, you have to ask yourself the question: What's God saying? Because He won't be silent. I don't think He will be. There will be a time -- there'll be three days, there'll be three weeks, there'll be a month, or something. God does that for, I think, at times a reason. But if you incline your ear, Joshua says, "Listen. Listen to the very word of God. Listen, and this is how you will know."

God wants to lead our church -- He does. And He wants to lead you. He wants to lead your family. But you have to give Him permission. You have to give Him permission -- if you want Him to lead you, you have to give Him permission to speak to your heart, to affirm your heart, to expose your heart. And then you have to make the decision, "God, I will listen. Even if I have to do something that seems scary, that seems bizarre or weird, or it will make people laugh at me."

I would imagine that when Joshua went back to his commanders and they said, "Well, what did God say?" He said, "Well, go get all the priests, find the Ark." "The Ark? What do you want us to do with the Ark?" "Well, it's the symbol of God." "Yes, and we're gonna put it in the back because we need to protect it. Whenever

we lose the Ark, we're in trouble. If we have the Ark, we have the presence of God. We're not sending it first -- it's vulnerable, it has no soldiers to protect it." Have you ever seen pastors fight? They're a bunch of sissies. It's ridiculous. Why would send the pastors in to the waters to become the warriors? When you make that decision to listen to God's plan, prepare -- there will be some people who will laugh at you. There will be people who will mock you. And there will be a score of people who question you. But if as you're leading your family you listen to God, I can take on the grounds of Scripture, He will lead you. And because He leads you, you will experience God's power. You will. Whatever is that obstacle, God says, "I will take care of it." They broke camp, the priests were carrying the Ark, they put their foot in the water, and like something they'd never seen before, the waters upstream dammed up. And the whole nation made it to the promised land. They touched the water. Why? "Joshua, I want people to follow you, and the only way they're going to follow you is if they believe that I'm with you like I was with Moses."

It's not a bad thing. It's not. It's not a bad thing to ask God, "God, would you vindicate me and my family? Would you validate me and my family? God, there are people who are questioning whether or not I am hearing from God. God, would you do something that allows them to know, I am not walking in the flesh, I'm trusting you?" That's not a bad prayer. That was Joshua's prayer. Actually, after God gave it to him. "Joshua, I want to validate you before the entire nation." God did it to every prophet. God did it to the kings that bowed their knee to Him. God did it to the leaders. God did it to the prophetesses. God did it to Naomi, He did it to Esther, and He will do it to you. Why? Because God longs for His church to experience His power. He longs for it. And God has a plan for us. He does. But here's the challenge -- it's going to take humility. Paul said it this way: "My grace is sufficient for you, and my power is perfected in weakness. Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may reside in me."

It's not a bad thing to come to the place where you say, "God, I'm not sure what step to take." I was listening to a podcast not long ago of Mark Batterson. He's written a number of books -- I think 19 different books. Marvelous stuff. I commend him to you. He's a pastor in Washington, D.C. He's done a great job. He's been there 28 years. And in this podcast, he was just reflecting. He said, "By nature, I think" -- he was confessing himself, "that I'm kind of a people-pleaser." And he said, "The reality is, for the past two and a half years, no one's been happy with me. Everyone's questioned every decision we've made, and they think we're this, we're this." And he said, "The reality is, for a person who likes to please people, this has been suicide." Then he said, "The other factor is, I'm a person of metrics. We measure ourselves a lot. 'How are we doing?'" And he said, "Every metric that we have every used in 28 years of doing ministry here no longer serves us." Somewhere about two-thirds through the tape, he made this statement -- he said, "I go sit in my office." And he goes, "I've never in 28 years had so many days where I'm absolutely clueless -- I don't know what to do."

We've never been here before. We've never witnessed 50 percent of the entire population, attendance-wise of the church, vacate. We've never been in a place where having unity and harmony in the body of Christ is such a fragile thing. And as Batterson said, "I've never been in a place where I'm this clueless after 28 years." I'd like to tell you -- it's not fun, it's just a good place to be. Because God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

When you have a million people looking to you for leadership, two million people looking to you for leadership, and you've got a river right in front of you, you feel weak. When you've got two million people who, every time they come to you, "I'm so sorry Moses is dead, Joshua. What are you gonna do?" you feel really weak. When you got two million people shouting, "We want Moses! We want Moses!" and your name is Joshua, you feel weak. My friend, God's going to lead you to that place. He's going to lead you to the place where you are exposed, and the only thing that you acutely feel is your weakness. That's what Joshua felt. It's called an obstacle. It's called the Jordan River.

You faithfully come to church downtown -- I applaud you. Seems like every week, including today, we have some challenge because of the neighborhood. And when you leave here, you'll see. And sometimes people ask, "Pastor, what are we gonna do?" You realize that there's agencies that sit on 10 to 15 million a year, and they've attempted to solve the problem and they don't. And I look across the block and I see a floodplain of pain. And there's days I want to go to Egypt -- I just can't figure out where Egypt is. And then I pause, and I read the Scriptures, and I realize that God sometimes parks us right at the place where we have the river in our view. And our weakness wells up within us. And Joshua says, "Prepare to move."

I don't think God's moving our church -- location-wise. I think God's going to move our church. I think He's going to change us. I think God has some solutions. I don't know what they are. He didn't ask Joshua to come up with solutions -- He did say to Joshua, "Consecrate yourself. Listen, and you will experience the power of God. I want to commend you to the Scriptures. Get ready to move. God has something for you, because who you were three years ago is not sufficient today. The faith that you had and the relationship that you had with God three years ago, that won't cut it today. And God wants to move you. And He says to you, "Consecrate yourself. Get ready to move." Declare, "I will listen," and God says, "You will experience my power." I don't tell you that because I'm making it up. I tell you that because God's word says that. And when He does -- and when He says, "I want to move you," you'll discover that obstacles are simply opportunities for God's glory to be seen. And God will tell us, "You don't need 15 million. Any more than Joshua needed a civil engineering department." He needed God. And that's what we need. And when you trust Him, you'll see God's power.