

How To Face The Impossible

Joshua 3

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Have you ever found yourself facing an impossible situation, a problem or difficulty that seemed impossible to conquer? Life is full of insurmountable difficulties, and perhaps right now you're facing one of them. Maybe you've just been diagnosed with cancer or some incurable disease. Maybe you got that phone call that that tumor, the biopsy came back and the tumor is malignant and your whole world has been rocked. Or maybe you're facing a difficulty in your marriage this morning. Maybe you're not talking, maybe you're sleeping in different rooms. I can't tell you how many times couples come to me and we're not even living together, we're not talking, and maybe she's filed divorce or he's filed divorce, or maybe you're living in an adulterous relationship. Maybe you're unfaithful to your wife or your husband, and you're facing a situation where "I don't know how my marriage is going to survive. I don't know how I'm going to get through this." And maybe you're facing a troubled teen. Maybe you have a teenager that is acting up or they've drifted away from God. They don't want to come to church anymore. Someone said when they're real little, they step on your toes. When they get big, they step on your heart. And maybe you have a broken heart today because a child, a son or daughter, has gone wayward. You've lost your job, you don't know how you're going to pay the bills, maybe you're going to be foreclosed on in your home, you don't know how you're going to save your home. There's a whole mirror of issues, maybe it's a relationship issue with a friend or a family member. Whatever your impossibility, here's the point today, God specializes in the impossible. God can do for you what no one else can do, what money can't do, what a friend can't do, what the pastor can't do, God can do what no one else can do.

The children of Israel under Joshua's leadership were facing an impossibility. It was called the Jordan River. And the river at this time, it was springtime, was flowing deep and wide. And they had 3,000 people in the congregation of Israel, and they had women and children, and boys and girls, and animals and sheep, and goats and oxen. How are they going to get them across that river into the Promised Land? They've waited 40 years plus for this day to come. They could look over and see the Promised Land but how are we going to get across? This is impossible. Like Israel standing at the Red Sea, God is going to part the waters, God is going to do a miracle, God specializes in the impossible. And what we learn in this chapter is the steps that we need to take when we are facing an impossible situation. So whatever you're dealing with, whatever you may deal with, I want you to take down these points this morning from this chapter and learn these three important lessons of what to do when you're facing an impossible situation.

Step number one, you need to focus your eyes on the Lord, in this case, the ark; focus on the Lord, the ark, and follow him. Follow with me beginning in verse 1, down to verse 4 of chapter 3: "And Joshua rose early in the morning...", verse one, "...and they removed from the Archaea Grove, and they came to Jordan, he and all of the children of Israel, and they lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass that after three days, that the officers went

throughout all the host; and they commanded the people saying, 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord...'" Now take note of that. You might want to make a note in your Bible, "... See the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests and the Levites bearing it, then you shall remove from your place and go after it."

There are two things they needed to do in verse three. They needed to see something, the Ark of the Covenant, and then they needed to do something. They needed to take a step and to begin to follow after it. My point is this, when you're facing a trial or when you're facing a difficulty, fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Joshua gets up early in the morning, he's an early riser. Jesus got up early, I think it's a good thing to get up before your day starts and pray and seek the Lord. Joshua followed the example of Jesus. He spent time, no doubt, in prayer and seeking the Lord's direction for the congregation. Lord, how are we going to get across this river? Lord, how am I going to deal with my boss? How am I going to deal with my husband? How am I going to deal with my wife? How am I going to deal with this problem? Get up and seek the Lord. Get your eyes, in this case, fashioned, or fastened, excuse me, on the Lord.

Then they waited for three days. Why? There are three million people that need to get across the Jordan River. It takes a long time to get word out to everybody, so they were starting to communicate, we're going to go down to Jordan, we're going to go across, they couldn't send a text, they couldn't send an email, they couldn't Facebook, they couldn't have a Joshua webpage. Go there for instruction on how we're going to get across River. They had to send these leaders out to the congregation, tell them how we are going to get across. So these instructions are "focus," verse 3, and then "follow."

Yet in verse 4 it says that they "...keep a space between you and it that is the Ark of the Covenant, 2,000 cubits." Now that was about 3,000 feet by measure. "Come not near unto it, that you may know the way for which you must go...". And then notice the last statement at the end of verse four, "...for you have not passed this way before." I love that statement. You have not passed this way before. How true is that of every one of us in life? Just when you think you've experienced everything, every problem, every difficulty, every situation known to man, something new comes into your life, right? And it's as almost as you can see, I've never passed this way before. I never dealt with this. I never dealt with that. I never had to struggle with this. I've got a difficulty that's insurmountable, that's impossible. We never passed this way before.

So the people, verse 3, were to fasten their eyes upon the ark. Now the question needs to be asked, what is the Ark and what does it signify? In the Old Testament, when they wandered in the wilderness, they had a tent which is called the Tabernacle and inside that was an inner tent which had the Holy of Holies, which had the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Inside this inner sanctuary, Holy of Holies, there was only one article of furniture and that was the Ark of the Covenant, it was behind the veil. Now this ark was about three feet nine inches long. It was about four feet high and it was about four feet wide. It was a box and was made out of acacia wood and it was covered with gold. In the four corners were rings that you put a gold pole through, and so the priest would put it on their shoulders and they would carry the Ark of the

Covenant on their shoulders. Now on top of this box was called the "mercy seat," that is the presence of God dwelt there. The kind of glory in the New Testament is called the propitiation. When Jesus died on the cross for our sins to satisfy the demands of God's law, he propitiated God the Father. The same word is mercy seat in the Old Testament. On top of the mercy seat were two cherub. They are angels, and they were facing one another with their wings touching as they looked over the presence of God over this box. Now in the box there were three items. The first was a rod of Aaron that had a bud on it. Aaron's rod that budded, symbolizing that Aaron to be the high priest. It was just a stick and God miraculously made this rod bud. They put it in that box. Second piece that was in that box were the Ten Commandments, what we call the decalogue, the Ten Commandments. And they were placed into that box and then the third item was a little gold pot. And in this gold pot was manna, the manna that God gave them from heaven to sustain them in the wilderness.

Now here is the significance of that Ark of the Covenant. It represents the presence of God. Over the mercy seat dwelt God's presence, and every item in that ark is a symbol or a picture pointing to Jesus Christ. He is our High Priest, the rod that budded. He is the fulfillment of the law. He died on the cross; He lived a perfect life satisfying the demands of the law. Then he died on the cross to pay the lost penalty. He is the bread of God, the manna in the golden pot, which comes down from heaven. It all pictures, it all points to Jesus Christ. It's in the cross of Jesus Christ that we find mercy, that we find forgiveness for our sins. So the point or the principle is this: whenever you're facing a difficulty, a trial, an insurmountable situation, what do you do? You fix your eyes on Jesus Christ, amen? You fix your eyes on Jesus Christ. There's an old hymn that says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow faintly dim in the light of His glory and grace. You go, "Well, John, that's not very profound, that's not very deep, that's not very insightful." No, but it's true. Simple, but it's not simplistic.

You know, often people come to me with their problems, "Pastor John, can you pray for me?" I can pray for you, but here's what you need to do; you need to get your eyes on Jesus Christ, amen? Remember when Peter stepped out of the boat? And he had his eyes on Jesus. Remember what he did? He walked on water. How's that for a miracle? That's amazing. In Egyptian hieroglyphics, the sign of the impossible are two little feet on top of water. That's the sign of the impossible. And that's what Peter did. He threw his legs over the boat, big old fisherman dude, big old legs, big old feet, and he started walking on Jesus, walking to Jesus. And the moment he took his eyes off the Lord, maybe someone yelled from the [boat], "Look out Peter, [here] comes a wave! Whoa!" Peter looked to the right, a big wave came, and he looked to the left, another big wave came. What happened to Peter? He began to sink down, amen? Until he did what? Cried out to who? He said, "Lord, save me." I think it was just a hand flailing over the top of the water. And he was kind of, "Lord, flail me." He was probably flailing and trying to run back. You see in the cartoons when people ran on the water, you know, it's impossible. But in real life, Peter was walking on water. He was doing the impossible as long as his eyes were fixed on Jesus Christ.

Let me recommend, if you're having trouble in your marriage, don't look at your marriage

partner. Ladies, don't look at your husband. You'll be depressed. (congregation laughing) Don't even look at him. Guys, don't look at your wife. Look at her, look [at] what she does. You know, I mean, get your eyes off your husband, get your eyes off your wife, and look at Jesus, amen? I recommend you not even look in the mirror. I'm always like sucking it in. It's like side provoking. Whoa. Forget it. Turn the lights off. Leave the room. Don't look in the mirror. Don't you hate those mirrors with bright lights over the top and you can see everything? It's like, "Ah!" Look away from yourself. Look away from your problems. Don't look at your bank book. Don't look at your checkbook. Don't look at your bills, don't look at your house, don't look at your car, I've seen some of the cars you drive. (congregation laughing) It'll depress you. Get your eyes on Jesus Christ. Fix your focus upon the Lord and be blessed. Psalm 25, verse 15, "My eyes are continually toward the Lord." Are your eyes continually fixed on Jesus?

If you're going to cross the Jordan, you're going to need to look at the Ark. Notice that there was a space that was supposed to be maintained. So because you have this huge crowd and God wanted the Ark to stay in view, He wanted [them] to remember that God was holy. Keep your distance, but you focus on the Ark. If everyone gathered close around the Ark, they wouldn't be able to see the Ark. So we need to keep the Ark in view as we crossed this Jordan.

Here's the second thing you need to do; it's in verse five. You need to sanctify yourself; you need to prepare your heart before the Lord. You fix your eyes on Jesus, and you prepare your heart before the Lord. Notice verse five, "Joshua said unto the people..." here it is, "...sanctify yourselves, tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." I love that. Now you would think that a military leader like Joshua would have said, "Sharpen your swords. We're going to go into battle." But instead of "sharpen your swords," it is "sanctify your heart." The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. That's why I recommend you get your eyes on Jesus Christ. I don't know what difficulty you're facing. I don't know what battle you're dealing with, but your focus needs to be on the Lord. He's the one who will give you victory. So you sanctify yourself.

Now what does it mean, verse five, to sanctify yourself? When the children of Israel came to Mount Sinai and God gave them the law, Moses said, "Sanctify yourselves." You know what they did? They took a bath and they put on fresh new garments. You say, "You're telling me I need to take a bath?" No, that's not what I'm telling you. I'm telling you that you need a new start. The bath symbolized forgiveness. The new clothes symbolized a new life. So you need to turn from your sin, ask God to forgive you, and dedicate, or the word I would use is consecrate, your life to following Jesus Christ. Being sanctified means we forsake all known sin and we are consecrating ourselves to love God, to obey God, and to serve God.

Many times people again will come and say, "Pastor John, will you pray for me?" What do you need? "I need a job." And many times, as I pray and I start to talk to them, I find out that they're living in deliberate, known sin. They're practicing some sinful thing. And I say, "Wait a minute, you want God to provide for you, but you're unwilling to obey him?" Now I don't think God blesses us because we're wonderful and He rewards us. I believe we're blessed of God

because of his grace and mercy, but we have a part to play. We must obey God. I don't want anyone thinking that you can just live however you want and expect to be blessed by God. God's presence and His peace and His joy is going to be in your heart when you're doing things, and you're thinking things that you know are pleasing to God. You have attitudes and actions that are pleasing and obedient to God. Isaiah 59 verse 1 says, "Behold the hand, the Lord's hand is not short that it cannot save, neither is his ear dull that he cannot hear, but your iniquities or sins have made a separation between you and your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." God always answers prayer, but he's not obligated to answer your prayer if you are willingly, deliberately, intentionally practicing sin.

So what am I telling you? I'm telling you, if God puts his finger on an attitude or an action that is sinful in your life right now, right here, before you leave this church service, get right with God. Get right with God. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sin...", that means that we agree with God that we've sinned. That "...God is..." what? "Faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us..." from what? "All unrighteousness." That verse, First John 1:9, is God's bar of soap. I like that. It's God's bar of soap. And whenever your heart is dirty, just give it a washing. Sanctify yourself, consecrate yourself, dedicate yourself. In chapter seven of Joshua, when the children of Israel go to take the city of Ai, they are defeated, why? Because their sin in the camp, Ai represents the flesh. And they're in the flesh, they had trusted in their flesh, but they were defeated because Akin had taken some garments and stole them and hidden them in his tent. He had disobeyed God. And so all the congregation was affected. Let me tell you something. When you sin, you don't only just affect your relationship to God, but your relationship to others. If there's sin in your life, it's going to affect your marriage; 99.9% of the marriage problems that I deal with is basically a sin issue. Get right with God. Get right with God and you'll be right with others. Well, what if they don't change? It doesn't matter, you'll [be] right with God. Get your heart right with God, focused on God.

So often we drift away from obeying God, or consecrating our life before God. It affects us, it affects our marriage, it affects our children, it can affect our church, our lives, our families, our church, and even our nation. We need to sanctify ourselves. I want to see us as a congregation, sanctified before God. This is the sanctuary, and the saints come into the sanctuary and then they leave to live sanctified lives, holy lives, lives that please God. You don't do that to be saved, you do that because you are saved. But if you need to do business with God today and you're facing some difficulties especially, say "God search me, know me and try me and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead in the way everlasting," sanctify yourself.

There's a third step and a last step, and you need to remember this one. Not only are you to focus on the ark, follow the Lord. Not only are you to forsake your sin and get right with God, but you are to step. You are to use your feet. So, we have the eyes, we have the heart, and we have the feet. You need to step out in obedience and faith, and trust God to get you across the river of difficulty, whatever your river might be, whatever your problem may be.

Notice in beginning in verse six, "Joshua spake unto the priest saying, 'Take up the ark of the covenant and pass over before the people.' And they took up the ark of the covenant, They went

before the people and the Lord said unto Joshua...", verse 7, "This day will I begin to magnify you in the sight of all Israel, that you may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." So, the purpose of this miracle of parting the waters of the Jordan, so that the people of God could pass through on dry ground, was so that Joshua would be magnified in the eyes of the congregation of Israel. "And thou shalt command...", verse eight, "the priests, that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, when you come to the brink of the water of Jordan...", notice what they're supposed to do, "...You shall stand still in the Jordan River. And Joshua said, into the children of Israel, come here and hear the words of the Lord your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites." You can throw in the "up-tights" and the "out-of-sights": and the "men-in-tights" and all that stuff. So, "Behold...", verse 11, "...the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you in the Jordan." Isn't it great that the Lord goes before us, and then He comes around us, and then He follows behind us? We're surrounded with the Lord when we go through a difficult time.

"Now therefore...", verse 12, "Take twelve men out of the twelve tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it should come to pass that as soon as the soles of the feet of the priest that bear the ark of the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan...". Note, not before, but not until their feet rest in the waters of the Jordan, "...that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand up as a heap."

What a blessing. Joshua tells the people, fix your eyes on the ark of the covenant. He tells the priest, take up the ark and step into the water. Step into the water, and not until they stepped into the actual water did the waters of the Jordan part. Then and only then could they walk out on dry ground and they could cross. Now, the Jordan at this time was swelling its banks. Some feel that it could have been as wide as a mile wide, very deep, rushing quickly. I was there just a few weeks ago and baptized in that Jordan River, saw it all the way down to the Dead Sea. Just before the Dead Sea, they would cross right there and give me on. And the waters were deep, the waters were wide, and it was impossible. But the cool thing is, is God is saying, when the priests step in, then the waters will part. Nothing would happen until they got their feet wet. You know, there's a lot of Christians that are afraid to get their feet wet. God tells them to do something, and they go, "Oh no Lord, You want me to step into the Jordan?" Yes. "Lord. I'm sorry Lord, I can't do that." How about what we say is "Lord, how about build a bridge? Put a hotel on the other side. I'll call, make reservations. I'll get a confirmation number. When everything's all set, then I'll step across." Do you know God doesn't work that way? God says, step out, get your feet wet, and then the waters will part. What an awesome truth.

Are you afraid today to step out in faith and trust God? Are you afraid to serve the Lord? You know, a lot of Christians are out of Egypt, but they're walking around in the wilderness. They haven't entered into the land of milk and honey, spiritually speaking. You know, crossing the Jordan, entering into Canaan's land, does not represent heaven. It represents the abundant life. It represents the spirit-filled, spirit-controlled life. It represents the obedient life. It represents the consecrated life. A lot of Christians are satisfied to just be out of Egypt, but they are fearful to

take the step of faith and trust God. God tells him, "I want you to be a missionary." And we say, "No, Lord, I can't do that." "I want you to teach Sunday school;" you go, "Lord, I'd rather be a missionary than teach Sunday school." (congregation laughing) "And please don't call me to the nursery. Oh, God, please don't do that" God says to you, "take a step, trust me, put your faith in me, and the waters will part." And not until. And a lot of Christians are afraid. Erwin Lutzer said, Like Israel, we will walk a path that we have never seen before. Each day is a new experience. A doctor may tell us we have cancer, a child may be injured in an accident, a teen may rebel against God. We may be injured and fired from our job, discovered that our investments have gone sour. We may have to face 100 injustices from those we thought were our friends. And these and 1,000 other circumstances, we can be confident that we are not heading into the future alone. God will go with us. So we focus on Jesus. We sanctify our hearts, but it is necessary now that we step out in faith. What is God asking you to do to take a step of obedience, to take a step of faith, to trust him?

You know, when the Lord called me to come to Revival Christian fellowship, I've been pastoring for 40 years. I'm 60 years of age. It's time for me to retire. I want a church in Tahiti. (Congregation Laughter) Lord, I thought you would call me to Bora Bora or Tahiti or Hawaii even, Lord. Lord says, "I want you to go to Menifee and I want you to shepherd that flock there. They need a pastor." And I knew beyond any doubt that God was calling me to come, but it was scary. It was the biggest step I'd ever taken. I'd ever taken. And yet when I took that step of faith and I said, "Okay, Lord, I'll be obedient to you," it's been the greatest adventure of my whole life. What a blessing it's been. And what a joy to be able to pastor this fellowship and how exciting it is to step and to watch God work and to trust Him by faith and to see that God has a whole new plan and a whole new miracle that He wants to do, not only in my life but in others. Don't be afraid. Don't hold back. Be willing to look at the Lord, prepare your heart and step out in faith and obedience, and watch God do a miracle.

So the story goes on, "that it came to pass...", verse 14, "...that when the people removed from their tents, they passed over Jordan, and the priest bearing the ark of the covenant went before the people. And as they bare the ark, when they were come to the Jordan, the feet of the priest that bare the ark were dipped into the brim of the water for the Jordan overflowed its banks at the time of harvest, and the waters that came down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far to the north, which was the city of Adam...", which is about 16 miles to the north, "...that besides Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea under the plain, even the salt sea, failed, they were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, all of the Israelites passed over on dry ground until all the people were clean past over the Jordan."

So this is the crossing of the impossible. Can you imagine when they were crossing looking around thinking, "Wow! This is amazing what God can do!" You fix your eyes on the Lord, you get your heart right with the Lord, you step out in faith and obey the Lord, and you'll be amazed at what God can do in your life. Now, some like to try to explain this away as being a natural occurrence. There are a couple of dates in the history of Israel where the Jordan River, the

banks collapsed, there was an earthquake, and around the same area, the banks of the river collapsed and dammed up the river for a few hours. So they will say there, "You know, there was an earthquake and the banks collapsed and it just coincidentally clogged up the river and they walked by." I don't believe that for a second. What are the chances that the moment the priest put their feet in the water, there would be an earthquake and the river would stop? What are the chances that immediately when they went across that the ground would be dry ground? There would still be murky and mucky, and there would be silt there and muddy and they wouldn't be able to get across. And what are the chances that when they came out of the river, the moment the last person crossed, that the water would start flowing again just on cue. And not to mention, God said it would happen, and guess what? God always keeps his word, amen? God does what He said He will do. So God told him what to do, They did it and they saw a miracle. It's that simple.

God tells you and I what to do. We obey, we get our heart right, we fix our eyes on the Lord, and what do we see? A miracle, amen. God will work a miracle in your life, in your marriage, in your family, and in your home and on your job. It doesn't matter, nothing is too difficult for God. Someone wrote these words in a beautiful song: "Got any rivers you think are uncrossable. Got any mountains you can't tunnel through. God specializes in things thought impossible. He'll do what no other friend can do." Trust Him, look to Him. Set your eyes on Jesus, surrender your heart to Jesus, step out in faith with your feet and obey Jesus. And what happened? Verse five, The people were sanctified, Joshua was magnified, and the Lord was glorified, verse 10, and verse 14 to 17, the word of God was verified. God wants to work in our lives, in our families, our marriages, and in this church. But he wants the people who have their eyes fixed on him, whose hearts have been consecrated to him, and whose feet are walking in faith and obedience. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.