

Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

THAT YOU MAY FEAR THE LORD (JOSHUA 4:15-24)

- I. **What Is the Chief End for Which God Saved Israel?**
- II. **The LORD Speaks to the Priests through Joshua (Joshua 4:15-16)**
 - A. 4:15 takes us back to the crossing again.
 - B. Throughout chapter 4, we have been going back and forth between the event of the crossing as well as the events that happened after the crossing.
 - 1. 4:1: “When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan...”
 - 2. 4:11: “And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people.”
 - C. But in 4:15, the author brings us back to that moment when the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan and the priests were called out of the river.
 - D. YHWH addresses Joshua.
 - 1. This is the third time that this phrase, “The LORD said,” appears (1:1; 3:7).
 - 2. What we have here are two things.
 - a. We have another reminder that Joshua is the one whom YHWH addresses directly.
 - b. We have another reminder that the Lord rules his people by his Word.
 - E. What is the Word that God wants Joshua to say to the priests?
—“Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan” (v 16).
 - F. Joshua faithfully reproduces God’s Words to his priests (v 17).
 - G. The priests obey God’s Word (v 18).
 - H. YHWH returns the waters to the Jordan (v 18).
—Once again, YHWH shows himself to be “the Lord of all the earth” (3:11, 13).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) In 4:15, we have the third time “The LORD said” appears. What are two truths we infer from this phrase? (2) What is the instruction the Lord asks Joshua to give the priests? (3) What happens when the priests leave the waters?

III. Israel Sets Up Camp at Gilgal (Joshua 4:19-20)

- A. Verses 19-20 tell us *when* Israel came out of the Jordan River and *what* happens after that.
1. *When?* “The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month...”
 2. *What* did they do? “...and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to vv 19-20, when does Israel leave the Jordan River? (2) What happened after Israel got up from the Jordan?

IV. Joshua Instructs Israel (Joshua 4:21-23)

- A. Once the Israelites had settled down (presumably), Joshua instructs them.
- B. Joshua’s instruction spans verses 21-24.
- C. Joshua anticipates that future generations of Israelites will ask their fathers about the Gilgal memorial.
- D. Israelite fathers are to use the occasion to teach their children three things:
1. *What happened:* “Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.”
 2. *How Israel passed over:* “For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over” (v 23).
 3. *The connection between YHWH’s stopping of the Jordan and his parting of the Red Sea:* “...as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea...”
- E. The impact that the Lord desires for this testimony to have is more than just knowledge. —God wants to nurture in every young Israelite heart an immediate sense of kinship or solidarity toward their fellow Israelites and above all, toward the Lord.

V. The Chief End for Which God Saved Israel (Joshua 4:24)

- A. But God has much more than national unity in mind.
- B. The Lord wants the nations to “know that the hand of the LORD is mighty.”
- C. The Lord wants the sacred testimonies to have an effect on his own people: “that you may *fear* the LORD your God forever.”
- D. What does “fear” mean here?
1. The Hebrew word is *yara*, which can mean “to be afraid”, “to be in awe of,” or “to hold in high esteem.”
 2. “Fear” need not necessarily be fear of what is evil. It can be fear/reverence of what is supremely powerful, good, transcendent, perfect, and holy.
 3. In this case, *yara* is reverential and holy fear of YHWH God the All-Perfect.
- E. The Lord saved Israel so that Israel will worship him in holy fear.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Based on 4:24, what other ends does God want his testimonies to achieve? (2) What does the Lord want the nations to know? How would this challenge the values of modern society? (3) What impact does the Lord want the retelling of the Jordan miracle to have on future generations of Israelites?

VI. Perfect Love Leads to (Reverential) Fear

- A. There is a strange paradox to the perfect love of God.
 - 1. On the one hand, the perfect love of God is what drives out fear (1 Jn 4:18).
 - 2. On the other hand, the perfect love of God (shown in his marvellous works) leads to fear.
- B. How do we reconcile these two truths?
 - 1. God's love drives out the fear of God's punishment because Christ Jesus has died for our sins.
 - 2. God's love drives us to reverence him as our sovereign and holy All Lord.

***Questions for reflection:** In what sense does God's perfect love lead to fear?

VII. Nurturing the Fear of the Lord through His Testimonies

- A. *How do we use the sacred testimonies of God to nurture the holy fear that God wants from us?*
- B. We use the testimonies in such a way that exalts the Lord's absolute supremacy.
 - 1. Too often, we can teach these stories in a way that actually minimizes that main intent.
 - a. It happens when we treat these stories simply as moral lessons; when we make the faithfulness of Israel the focus.
 - b. Joshua will later cast doubt on Israel's own faithfulness (Josh 24:19).
 - 2. What exactly about the Lord are we to communicate through these testimonies?
 - a. We must emphasize that the LORD God is the Lord of all the earth.
 - b. We must proclaim the LORD God as the covenant-keeping Patron of his people.
- C. We use the testimonies in such a way that puts us in direct contact with God.
 - 1. See how Joshua instructs the Israelite fathers to teach their children. And notice how personal this instruction is.
 - a. "...For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for *you* until *you* passed over..."

- b. “You” refers to children who were not even alive during the time of the crossing.
 - c. All of God’s Holy Nation—the Church of YHWH and his Messiah—throughout history was represented in the crossing on that day.
2. In Christ, we were there when Joshua spoke to Israel!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we use the sacred testimonies of God to nurture the holy fear that God wants from us? (2) How are we not to use the testimonies of God? (3) In what sense were we there that day Israel crossed the Jordan? Can we read Joshua 4:15-24 as a *personal* word from God to us?

VIII. In Conclusion: *Soli Deo Gloria!*

The Lord God saved us at the Jordan because he wants us to revere him as our supreme King and Savior. Therefore, the Lord wants us to use the sacred testimonies of his saving acts to nurture reverential fear in us. Such healthy and holy fear is cultivated in two ways: (1) When we exalt the Lord’s absolute supremacy as revealed in those testimonies; (2) when we read the testimonies in such a way that we ourselves are placed in direct interaction with the Lord God himself.