

INI - SDG

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday a. Trinity

July 24, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Series: Joshua 05

**Text: Joshua 3 - *Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. 2 So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; 3 and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. 4 "Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before." 5 And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." 6 Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. 7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. 8 "You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.' " 9 So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." 10 And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: 11 "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. 12 "Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. 13 "And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap." 14 So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, 15 and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), 16 that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.***

Theme: "Land Me Safe On Canaan's Side"

- Obstacles

## - The LORD's safe deliverance

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

When I was in grade school, one of the things we enjoyed doing with our free time was playing the computer game "Oregon Trail" on our ancient Apple II GS school computers. The basic premise of the game was to get your character from Independence, Missouri to the Willamette Valley in Oregon by covered wagon in 1848. The journey was a difficult one. You had to withstand attacks by Indians, hunt for food to feed your family, deal with snake bites, and avoid all sorts of deadly diseases! But there was also the difficulty of river crossings in the covered wagon - most notably the Snake River. Sometimes you could ford the river with your covered wagon and survive in tact. Other times you and your party would perish by the mighty torrent of the Snake River. The game was intended to be educational as it taught students about the various challenges pioneers would have faced as they made their way west to settle the territory of Oregon.

What the Children of Israel went through during their journey from Egypt to Canaan was no video game. They suffered through plagues, diseases, hunger, thirst, fiery serpents, and death. People suffered and died because of their own sinful choices. They disobeyed and rebelled against the God who freed them from slavery in Egypt. The suffering they brought on themselves was greater than anything on the Oregon Trail.

Many of the things that happened to the Children of Israel remind us of things that happen to the Church. As they wandered in the wilderness, so we are pilgrims and sojourners in the wilderness of this world. As they waited and hoped for the Promised Land of Canaan, so we wait and hope for the Promised Land of heaven. As they brought many difficulties on themselves because of their sinful choices, so we bring many difficulties on ourselves because of our sinful choices.

In our text we hear that the Children of Israel are finally ready to enter Canaan. Only one thing stands in their way - the Jordan River. Let us examine the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River and consider our crossing over to the Promised Land of heaven. Our theme is taken from our closing hymn, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah." We pray with the hymn writer that the LORD would "Land Me Safe on Canaan's Side." We will examine the obstacles that stood between the Children of Israel and their entrance into Canaan and consider the obstacles that stand between us and the Promised Land of Canaan. Then let us be amazed at how the LORD lands us safely in the Promised Land. May the Holy Spirit bless our study of His holy Word.

## - OBSTACLES

One big obstacle that stood between the children of Israel and the Promised Land of Canaan was the Jordan River. Now when the two spies crossed the Jordan to spy out Jericho, it did not sound as though they had too much difficulty. They probably paid to have a ferry take them across, or they were able to ford the stream itself. But now an entire nation of approximately 2 million people are preparing to cross the Jordan River. And this is no trickling stream. They were about to cross the Jordan in the spring time when the snow melt from Mount Hermon and the spring rains caused the Jordan to swell and flood.

How would could they get all these people across safely? If they did it too slowly, the

enemies on the other side of the river might take advantage of the situation. After a few had crossed they could ambush them and slowly kill off the Children of Israel as they tried to cross the river. If they weren't careful and rushed things, people could get swept away and perish. They obviously had a huge obstacle in front of them.

What obstacles stand between us and an eternity with the God of heaven and earth? It is something much worse than a flooded river. It is much deeper than the Jordan River ever was. It's torrents sweep us off our feet. It is the deluge of our sin. Isaiah writes, **"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."** (Is 59:2) Our sins are like a giant barrier between us and God. They separate us from the one true God. They are an obstacle that keep us and God apart - now on earth and forever in hell.

We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that we should be able to go to heaven because we're not as bad a sinner as others. After all, we've never killed anyone. We don't sleep around. There are worse sinners out there than us. We should be able to overcome our obstacle of sin if we work hard enough. That is an unscriptural mind set. Listen again to what Isaiah writes, **"But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away."** (Is 64:6) In God's sight, even our best deeds are stained with the ugliness of our sin.

And James writes, **"Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."** (Jam 2:10) It doesn't matter how much or how little of the Law of God we've kept. If we even STUMBLE at one point - not fall into gross sin necessarily - but STUMBLE at one point in God's law, it's as if we had broken all His commandments. That is because when we stumble at obeying one of God's commandments, we are breaking the First and great Commandment by not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. Sin is our obstacle that is keeping us apart from God and an eternity in the paradise of heaven.

#### THE LORD SAFELY DELIVERS

"My Lord is so great, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing that my Lord cannot do. The mountains are His, the valleys are His, the stars in the sky are His too. My Lord is so great, so strong, and so mighty, there's nothing my Lord cannot do." Our VBS kids should remember this as one of the songs they sang during their music break. We are reminded in our text that there really is nothing that the Almighty cannot do. While the Jordan River was an obstacle too large for the people, it was not too large an obstacle for the LORD. The LORD safely delivered His people on Canaan's side.

How the LORD overcame this obstacle is a miracle. The moment the priest who were carrying the ark of the covenant set foot in the Jordan River, the LORD held back the water upstream in a heap, we read. But if up in Jamestown they were to stop the flow of water into the James River, what would you expect the bottom of that river to be like? Probably smelly, mucky mud. Even though there would be no water in the Jim, it would take days if not weeks for the muddy bottom to dry up and be cross able.

Was a muddy river bed another obstacle for the Children of Israel to cross over? We again see the miraculous working of almighty God as He not only stops the flow of the flooded Jordan River, but immediately dries up the river bed. In the last verse of our text we read, **"Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in**

***the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.***” Obstacle removed by the Lord of all the earth. His people landed safely on Canaan’s side.

The obstacle of our sin that separates us from God is broader than the Jordan. Our river of sin does not just have a muddy bottom, it is a bottomless pit that sinks into hell. The current of our river of sin sweeps us off our feet and into the eternally Dead Sea. Our sins have separated us from God and we are unable to cross. Yet this obstacle is not too great for our God. Even as He allowed Israel to cross safely to Canaan’s side, so too He does with us.

God is a God of justice. That is, He always does what is right and just. As a just God He cannot simply ignore our flood of sin, He cannot simply look the other way. Sin, disobedience, and rebellion against His will must be dealt with. The punishment for these sins must be carried out. Justice must be served. How did God overcome this obstacle? He overcame it Himself for us. The Son of God took on flesh, He became one of us to take our sin and our punishment on Himself. On the cross, Jesus suffered the wrath and punishment of God on account of our sin. Justice for our sins was carried out on Jesus. ***“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”*** (Is 53:5) ***“As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”*** (Ps 103:12) He has cast our iniquity into the depth of the sea (Mic 7:19) - never to be seen again.

Jesus stopped the flood of God’s wrath against our sins Himself. Just as the Jordan was held back, so God’s wrath was held back by Jesus stepping in. And because of Jesus, we can pass over on dry ground. Rather than a muddy river bottom that we might sink into because of our unrighteousness, Jesus has given us firm ground to walk on in His righteousness. Through faith in Jesus, His perfect righteousness is credited to our account. We are healed. Through Christ we have direct access to the throne of Almighty God.

In Jesus we will land safe on Canaan’s side. As the Way, the Truth, and the Life we follow Him into death knowing that our eyes will open in the Promised Land of heaven. In fact, Jesus says that we have already passed over from death to life. Peter writes that our eternal inheritance in heaven is reserved for us. Our Triune God who overcame the obstacle of the Jordan River for His people, has overcome our obstacle of sin and removed it forever through Jesus. Now He leads us through the Valley of the Shadow of Death to the eternal mansions He has prepared for us in heaven. Praise be to the living God who is among us, the Lord of all the earth who safely delivers us from this veil of tears to Himself in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.