

Joshua 4:10-11

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[0:00] Joshua chapter 4, we read in verses 10 and 11 for the priests, which bale the ark, stood in the midst of Jordan, until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua, and the people hastened and passed over, and came to pass when all the people were clean, passed over, that the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests in the presence of the people.

Like so much of the Old Testament, which is all of course pointing us to Christ, there is much in the physical actions and history of the children of Israel, which of course is itself a parable, an illustration, and it is pointing on to the spiritual fulfilment and reality of what Christ comes to do. We see even in these verses 10 and 11 in chapter 4, the priests which bale the ark, stood in the midst of Jordan, until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people.

Now often of course in spiritual illustration we might say, the river Jordan is often depicted as the river which must be passed over from death to life.

That you know, if we think of the likes of Pilgrim's progress and so on, and also if we think of passing through the waters, the Lord says, I will be with you, and so on. And Jordan, being the only major river in the Holy Land, is often taken as a sort of symbol of that which must be passed through to enter into life in all its fullest.

[1:37] The promised land, which is of course likewise a parable, an illustration of heaven itself. But we see here how the Lord in the early days of course, in the patriarchal days, the days of Noah and Abraham and Isaac and so on, had no any kind of visible representation at all.

He spoke to his patriarchs, he spoke to his saints, and they went by faith in a God that they could not see. Now these Israelites are still called upon to do that, but once they are out into the desert, once the Lord has delivered them through the plagues of Egypt and brought them out across the Red Sea and into the Sinai Peninsula and so on.

There of course, he instructs them to read up and to create not only the tabernacle, but also this Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant which was to be the symbolic presence of God in their midst.

Now of course, it was just in physical terms, a comparatively small box, overlaid with gold, with cherry rings on the top and so on, and carried with poles, and inside it were to be put the comparatively small, smaller than we probably think of them as being tables of stone, the tablets of bearing the law, the Ten Commandments and so on.

Now these, as the sort of expression of God's speech were inside the Ark that nobody was allowed to just sort of feel and say, ooh look what's in there, there's nothing there, where is God?

[3:06] It was the symbolic presence of God amongst them, a sort of focal point, if you like. And the fact that the Lord was not to be treated lightly, even in his symbolic presence, we find illustrated plenty of times.

Not only if we think of it, the slightly perplexing case of Yutza, when the oxen were bringing the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem, and it stumbled, or it shook on the ground, and he put forth his hand to steady it, and the Lord smote him, and he died.

In 2 Samuel 6, we read, when he came to make on the streshing floor, Yutza put forth his hand to the Ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Yutza, and God smote him there for his error, and there he died by the Ark of God.

And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Yutza, and he called the name of the place Teres Yutza to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, how shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?

And that's just putting forth his hand to steady New York, a more serious punishment fell. We read in 1 Samuel 6, upon the men of Beth Shemesh, where we read in verse 19.

[4 : 20] He smote the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord. This is after it came back from the land of the Philistines. They looked into the Ark of the Lord, even he smote the people 50,000 and three score and ten men.

And the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Beth Shemesh said, who is able to stand before this holy Lord God, and to whom shall he go up from us?

So the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord is not just a box that anyone can sort of peer into or deal with rightly. It was intended to be the fearful, in the correct sense.

It was to inspire awe and a certain fear of the Lord and dread that the Lord was there in the presence of his people. And as long as the Lord was there in the midst of his people, symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, then they didn't have to be afraid.

He was there in their midst. Now, of course, passing through the Jordan into the, I was going to say the promised land, it is the promised land. But remember that, in a sense, the promised land has already come out.

[5 : 31] It has already come eastwards, because we might say that in the Lord's initial plan, it was simply to be the land of Canaan that was the promised land. But because the tribes of Gad and Asher, the half-tribe of Manasseh, and so on, not Asher, a bigger part, tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh, sorry, Reuben and Gad and half-tribe of Manasseh, wanted their inheritance on the east side of Jordan.

And the Lord allowed them to take their pasture land there, as long as they helped with the conquest of the land of Canaan. So, in a sense, what they dwelt, it was also part of God's inheritance, wasn't part of the promised land.

It came out, as it were, eastward. And so, when they come across the Jordan, they're entering into their inheritance. But to try and wade or swim across the Jordan would have been certain death.

So, especially when it's in flood, and it's intended to be a miracle here, because we read at the end of chapter 3, that the water Jordan overflows all his banks all the time of harvest, verse 15.

So, the Lord isn't just doing it when it's dry in the height of summer. It's just a wee trickle, and it's going to be low, so you can just splash across. He's waiting until it's at its fullest, where at the time of harvest, when no doubt there's the most flow from the rivers upstream and upriver, and perhaps the snows of Hermon melting into the river and making it the fullest and the most overflowing it possibly could.

[7 : 04] This is when the Lord chooses to demonstrate his power, and to bring his people across that which is a barrier of nature at its greatest extent.

And the priests go down into the Jordan, but as soon as they do, the waters pile up and the flow of water is cut off. Now, the Lord, in a sense, we might say, goes then before his people into the midst of that which would be death.

But in doing so, of course, that death ceases. The waters are cut off above the precipice, very far from the city. I don't know, that's about 10 miles upstream.

So, if it's very far from there, perhaps it's a good bit nearer to where the children of Israel are passing over. But it would take some considerable time, of course, for all the Israelites to pass over, even once the waters of the Jordan have been cut off.

The Lord has gone, symbolically, in the presence of the Ark of the Breast, the Lord has gone before his people in order to clear the way, and to keep the waters from flowing down upon them.

[8 : 15] In a sense, it becomes a land bridge between one side of the bank and the other. They are able simply to cross dry shod because the Lord's symbolic presence has gone there before them and held back the waters of death, as it were.

In the New Testament, we are familiar with the passage in John 11 when Martha and the late of Mary are pleading, as it were, with Jesus. Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Lazarus has died, of course. And Martha, of course, greets Jesus in this way in John 11 and verse 21. Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. There's almost a hint of hope there in Martha's prelude. The Lord could even bring him back from death if he wanted to, but she almost doesn't dare to ask.

When Jesus said unto thy brother shall rise again, Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day. In other words, yes, Lord, I know I've come the last day, everybody's going to rise and so on.

[9 : 27] But she is a grieving sister. She is bereaved these four days. She has sent the message to Jesus telling him that Lazarus is sick.

Hoping that he will come, hoping that he will heal him and she'll have her brother back. But he didn't. He delayed and he delayed deliberately. And by the time he came, Lazarus was dead. Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. I know he'll rise again in the resurrection of the last day. She's hurting now. What she wants is some hope. Now, yes, it's after the resurrection of the last day.

And I'm not in any way criticizing that or in any way saying, oh, well, she should have had more faith, you know. But the fact is, that's a long way in the future. As far as she knows, she needs some comfort now.

She needs help now. Those who are grieving. Those who are bereaved. Those who are wounded and sore need their help now. It's all very well to somebody who's dying of thirst and the death.

[10 : 28] Say, well, if you just make another ten miles, you know. There's a lovely cool oasis there. Plenty of water. You just keep crawling. And if you manage it there, that's fine. It'll be there for you then.

They need water now. They need help now. They need strength now. And Jesus says to her there and then, I am the resurrection and the life. And I'm here. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. This is his statement about himself. You want resurrection? I'm here. I am the resurrection. Resurrection consists in me. Life from the dead consists in me.

I am the one that goes before into death, that raises from the dead. Do you believe us, Martha? I believeth thou this. She said, I'll come get him off. I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

Whatever it is that you want to do, Lord, I believe in your power to do it. She doesn't necessarily believe that he will do it. She doesn't necessarily believe that he'll want to raise Lazarus from the dead or to help her in the midst of her grief.

[11 : 35] But she believes he has the power. And the thing is that so often, I would suggest to you, this is one of the stumbling blocks or one of the brick walls that people hit.

It's because most people, particularly those who seek to be Christian, most people would accept, of course God has the power to do this. Of course God can either raise the dead or stop my situation or help me or give me comfort or strength or whatever it is I need.

The Lord can. I just don't know if he actually wants to. I just don't know if he actually desires to help me when I am. And there is a sense in which, well, either God doesn't love me enough or maybe I'm this priest in some way or maybe he's just not going to help in this situation.

And this, sadly, is an indication of our little faith. We sort of think as though God doesn't actually really care about me that much. Because if he did, he would help me.

Now, of course the Lord knows exactly what is best for us. And of course there will be times when he may say, well, actually I can't. I'm not going to help you with this just now because I want something else to happen.

[12 : 47] I want something better to happen. You need to go through this just now. But I'm with you in it. And I'm not letting go of you. I am the resurrection of the life. And just because we may not get an instant answer to a particular pet prayer that we want, it does not mean the Lord has forgotten about us or does not care about us.

He loves us so much that he was willing himself to go down into death. That's what we've just been remembering this past weekend. To bear the punishment of all who would trust and believe in his name.

And to bring them into fullness of life. That he himself is the resurrection and the life. They need that help now. Martha needs that help now. And Jesus, of course, as we know, goes on then to raise Lazarus to life.

There and then, in the now of their lives. Now here are the children of Israel. They're about to enter the promised land. Probably those in Jericho and other places think, well, we are a bit scared of

these people.

But as long as they're on the other side of Jordan. And as long as it's flooding its banks. We should be okay for a little while. We have the protection of nature. Nature is at the disposal of nature's God. [14:02] The one who has created all these things. The priests which bear the ark stood in the midst of Jordan. Until everything was finished. But the Lord commanded Joshua.

Of course, in reference to this over the past weekend. It is finished. That is accomplished. Which the Lord intends to do. And what the Lord intends to do here.

Is to bring across all of his people. That he intends to bring into the land of Canaan. Into the promised land. He intends to leave none behind. Of course, every illustration.

Every parable. Is not in its exactitude. A recreation of the thing it depicts. You know, obviously. Some of the tribes of Reuben. And Manasseh.

And Gad. You know, Gad were staying on the other side. Of Jordan. So, I mean. Those people in their cities. And the civilians that were staying there.

[14:59] As opposed to the armed men. Who came across to help with the conquest. They're kind of left behind. In that sense. When the Lord brings his people from death. To life. He doesn't leave any behind.

Who desire to enter in. Of course, he could say that there are some who don't desire. Those who maybe have mixed with the Lord's people. Those who have been part of the Lord's people.

Or even related to the Lord's people. Who still don't really want. Part of what the Lord has prepared for them. You know, we read, of course, in Exodus 12. Of those who came up.

Out of the land of Egypt. The children of Israel. Verse 37. Chapter 12 in Exodus. Journey from Ramesses to Sathal. About 600,000 on foot. That were men. The side children.

And a mixed multitude went up also with them. And flocks and herds. And very much cattle. A mixed multitude. Could be Egyptians. Amongst the poor Egyptians, perhaps. It could be those of other nations.

[15:54] Who had also been enslaved. It could be any number of other people. But they weren't all simply Israelites. Others who thought, we love a bit of this. We want some freedom. We want to be freedom out of slavery.

We'll go with you. We'll go where you're going. We'll join in. They're not refused. They're not turned away. It's one of the things when the Lord is giving out the law.

That he says repeatedly. In Deuteronomy and in Exodus and so on. He says, you know. When he gives the law. He says, there'll be one law. For those who are of your nation.

And for the stranger that lodges with you. It'll be the same law that applies to everybody. Whether they're one of the mixed multitude. Whether they're a stranger that happens to be soldiering with you. Whether somebody's staying for a wee while.

Whether they're a visitor. Or whether they're a home born Israelite. Same law will apply to everybody. You can't say with God's law. Oh, actually that isn't my particular culture or tradition.

[16:49] I happen to come from a culture of many gods. So I'll just exercise my human rights. And I'll just worship all my different gods here amongst the children of Israel. No, you won't.

If you do that, you'll be for death. Because that is what God pronounces on this ideology. If you're going to be amongst the Lord's people. The children of Israel.

There's one law. It covers them all. And so likewise, as this mixed multitude is there. There is the opportunity for, we might say anybody. Who wants to join themselves to the Lord's people.

To be free to do so. We looked in recent weeks at Ruth. The Moabitex. Who, taking the faith of the Lord's people. And applying her heart to the God of Israel.

Israel follows her mother-in-law. And is blessed in the midst of the Lord's people. We have the invitation to Moses' father-in-law. We read about in Numbers 10. In verse 29.

[17:45] Moses said unto Hobart, the Son of Brant, you all the Midianites. Moses' father-in-law. We are journeying. Unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you. Come thou with us.

And we will do thee good. For the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto them, I will not go. But I will depart to my own land. And to my kindred.

Isn't that just a summing up. Of so much of what we might call evangelism. Because we seek to invite others. We seek to encourage others.

To come with us. On this journey to the promised land. We are journeying unto the place. Of which the Lord said, I will give it to you. Come thou with us.

And we will do thee good. You can be part of us. You can have what we have. You can enjoy what we enjoy. You can be blessed by what we are blessed with. As the Lord deals with us.

[18 : 39] Dealing with you. For the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go. But I will depart to my own land. And to my kindred.

And remember how it's said. Tragically of Judas. He departed. To go to his own place. Now we can't of course say that Moses' father-in-law was definitely lost. That would be to stretch the illustration in the parable too far.

But it does illustrate. The choice that is set before us. Whether we are Israelites or Gentiles. Whether we're Jews or non-Jews. Whatever our nationality or background.

It is the same invitation. Come with us. We are on a journey to the land the Lord has prepared us. Come with us and we will do thee good. Well no actually I'll go back to my own country.

And I'll just live my own life. And I'll take my own chances. And that's what so many choose to do. We couldn't enter the promised land. If we did not have a great high priest.

[19 : 35] Who went before us. And accomplished. Finished the work that was there for us. For him to do. The priest of course. Every priest in the Old Testament. Is pointing to our great high priest.

The Lord Jesus. Which bear the ark. The symbolic presence of God. They are physically bearing. The symbolic presence of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ. Bore within himself.

And in his flesh. And his body. And his soul and spirit. The presence of the living God. That's what he took with him to the cross. Although it was his body that died.

It was a divine sacrifice. If it hadn't been. It would have sufficed only for himself. It wouldn't have been enough. For all those in every age.

Who believe in him. The priests which bear the ark. Stood in the midst of Jordan. If as we're saying. The Jordan represents. The waters of death.

[20 : 30] That would overflow. Or over flood. Anyone who tried to cross. That would sweep them away. Those waters are stopped. They are held back. Until the Lord's people.

Have clean passed over. Now we might say. Yeah. You know. Jesus died 2,000 years ago. On the cross. And then he rose again. So how is he sort of in the midst of death now?

How is he holding it for us? The Lord Jesus holds open. By means of his overcoming. Then he holds open the door of life. The way to life. For us. We will not be swept away.

By those waters of death. Because there is effectively. A land bridge. For us to walk across. That he has made possible for us. Our great high priest.

Has finished the work. The Lord gave him to do. The priest which bare the ark. Stood in the midst of Jordan. Until everything was finished. That the Lord commanded Joshua.

[21 : 27] Of course Joshua stood with the Hebrew. For Jesus. To speak unto the people.

According to all that Moses commanded Joshua. And the people hastened. And passed over.

And it came to pass. When all the people were clean. Passed over. That the ark of the Lord passed over. And the priests. In the presence of the people. Our Lord will continue.

To hold back. The power of death. Until all his people. Are safely passed over. Now. If you think of the children of Israel.

Crossing the Jordan there. Think. You know. There is something like. 1.2 million of them probably. There is 600,000 that are men. And then you have got. All the females as well.

You have got all the children. As well. Not counting the mixed multitude. You are looking at. 1.2 million or thereabouts. Maybe 1.5 million. Who knows. Actual people crossing over.

[22 : 23] Now. That doesn't happen. Quickly. Even though it is a comparatively short.

Geographical distance. They have to cross. They are not going to be crossing. In single file. Of course.

There is going to be a huge multitude of them going across. Hopefully in an ordinary manner. The Ark of the Covenant is going to be there. Right in the midst of them. As they are passing across. No doubt. Hundreds on either side of it.

Huge. Wide. Expansion. Going across. A huge number of people. And those at the back. Are we sort of thinking. Oh. I wonder when it is going to be our turn. And those at the front. Will be across. Well before the others behind them.

And so it is with us. There are those who have entered eternity. From Abel right at the beginning. All the way down through Adam and Noah. And Abraham. Isaac and Jacob. And all the patriarchs.

And all the saints. And all the apostles. And still the people are passing over. Still the Lord's people are going. From the one side of Jordan. To the other. Still the crowds keep going.

[23 : 19] While the Lord's symbolic. And real presence. Holds back the power of death. Whilst they keep passing over. And it is a huge number. That after Passover.

And those at the beginning. Will be over long before. Those at the end. But it is a continuous flow. And it is a continuous flow. Also in this world.

Of the Lord. Gathering his people ultimately. Into the promised land. It never ceases in one sense. Every single day. All over the world. In fact.

Even all over the country. There will be those who are the Lord's. Being gathered into eternity. Eternity. Passing from one side of the Jordan. To the other. Passing from the land of their conquest. And fights at last. Into the promised land. And it is a continuous flow of people. Until finally the day will come. When the number of the elect.

[24 : 16] A precise number. Known exactly to the Lord. But not known to us. When the last person has crossed over. And when the last person is up. But on the other bank.

What is Joshua? Then he sets up the stones. In the midst of course. As a witness. Then he says to the priest. Okay. Pick up the ark. And we will take you across. Finally. The priests themselves. Baring the ark. They leave the joy. Finally. They go. Last of all. Bringing up the rear. And let the good shepherd. Bringing up the last of his sheep.

Bringing them all safely across. Because the priests come last. The priest who is. As it were.

Symbolizing the goal between. Between God and man. Our great high priest.

Will be the last one. Who will gather up all of creation. Under him. And then present it. As it were.

To his father's glory. And he gathers everybody up.

[25 : 09] He's the last one after that. He's the first one to triumph over death. But as it were. When he has finished his work. When the last elect's over. Has crossed that river.

Then he himself. Will likewise. Close off. All that is done. The Jordan. Will flow back again. And there's no way back across now. There's no more land bridge.

In that sense. As we said. The illustration. The parable. The picture. It is not perfect. Because people could still. Yes. Take boats. Or they could still. So they're.

We don't swim across. The physical river. But once the way is shut. And once the Lord. Has completed his work. There is no more way. Across that passage.

There is nobody. Going to say. Oh no. I'd actually like to come too now. Once the priests are gone. Once the ark of the covenant. Is gone. Once the work of Christ. Is finished. There is no other means.

[26 : 04] Of crossing that great divide. And that's what we read. Of course. In Luke 16. With the parable. Of the rich man. And that's it. As Abraham says. There's a great gulf fixed. But he knows. On that side.

And moves on the side. We can't cross over to you. You can't cross over to us. Even if you wanted to. But the Lord has finished. The work. That he was given to do.

And therefore. He commanded the priests. Saying. Come ye up out of Jordan. It came to pass.

When the priests. That bear the ark. Of the covenant of the Lord. Were come up out of the midst. Of the Jordan. And the souls of the priests. His feet were lifted up.

Unto the dry land. That the waters of Jordan. Returned unto their place. And flowed over all his banks. As they did before. When does that happen? On the last souls of the cross.

It came to pass. Verse 11. When all the people. Were clean. Passed over. That the ark of the Lord. Passed over. And the priests. In the presence of the people.

[27 : 01] At the moment. You could say. That we are part of this great crowd. Thousands. Hundreds. Millions. Have gone before us. How many will come after us. We don't know. Until the end of time.

Will be. But we know. We are part of the crowd. We know. We are working our way. Across the Jordan. We have been. In the land of our wanderings. We have got a promised land. Ahead of us. And here we are.

Crossing over. How are we going to cross. This river of death. Because the Lord. Holds back. The waters of death. The Lord. Holds back. The role of the Jordan.

The Lord. Causes it. To stand on the hill. Oh but that's impossible. The things which are impossible with men. Are possible with God. Oh but that's against nature. You're right.

This is supernatural. This is over and above nature. That's what a miracle is. And when God redeems one lost soul.

[27 : 53] It is a miracle of his grace. It is costly. It is precious. In the sight of the Lord. It is the death of his sins. He holds back.

The power of death. And as long as he continues to do it. There is a means of passing over. There is a means of having. The resurrection of the life.

That whosoever believes in him. Should not perish. Should be able to pass clean over. Without ever tasting of death. Oh yes our bodies will experience it. But our soul.

The living reality. That is you or me. Or whoever it may be. That living reality. Of our soul. That does not die. Will not taste of the death.

The bitterness of it. Will not be there. It will be felt to an extent. By those who are left behind us.

They will sorrow. They will grieve. They will be believed. Like one thou may be.

[28 : 47] But they won't taste of death. Themselves. If they are trusting in Christ. Because we simply pass. From life. To glory to life. Life. Year to life.

You know. And spoonless. From that kind of. Almost borrowed. Bit of the promised land. That sort of. Came out eastwards. For the tribes. Of Reuben and Garen. The half tribe of Manasseh. And so on.

That they got. What they asked for there. But the real inheritance. Was ahead of that. And the only means. Of acquiring it. Is by God's miraculous. Intervention.

The priests. Which bear the heart. The presence of God. Stood in the midst of Jordan. As our Lord. Stands as it were. In the midst of death.

And holds it back. So that we may pass over. From life. To greater life. In all its fullness. We need comfort. Now.

[29 : 41] We need assurance. Now. We need that solace. Now. Which only the Lord. Can give. Then he is ready. To give it. I am. The resurrection.

And life. There is no death. In me. There is no overflowing. Stream and flood of death. I hold it back. For all who are trusting. And believing in me.

Came to pass. When all the people. Were queen. Passed over. That the ark of the Lord. Passed over. And the priests. In the presence. Of the people. He will continue.

To hold it back. Until the very last one. The 100th sheep. Or even though the 99. May be over long ago. He will go seeking.

Bringing in. The very last. Lost lamb. And there is not a single one. Of his people. Who will perish. Will be left. On the wrong side of the river.

[30 : 36] He will bring them all. Clean over. And if we are trusting. And believing in him. We know. That he who cannot lie. Will fulfill.

All of his truth. Until. Everything. Was. Finished. That the Lord. Commanded. Joshua. And so that. Which our Lord.

Commanded. His son. Jesus Christ. Is in a sense. Already accomplished. Because he is already. As it were. There in the midst of Jordan. He is already there. Holding back.

The power of death. It is already from life. To greater life. That we are invited to go. Only if we are. Trusting in Christ. Only if we cross. At this point.

Where God the son is. Outside of him. There is only death. Outside of him. There is only idolatry. Outside of him. And the life. And the eternity he offers.

[31 : 30] There is only hell. Hell on earth. Without him. Hell in eternity. Without him. But in him. Is all the grace. The glory.

The power of life. In all its fullness. I am. The resurrection. And the life. Said the Lord. And he continues. To fulfill his work.

Until everything. Was finished. That the Lord. Commanded. Joshua. Bless him. The Lord. Jahres her.

I am not mistaken. Lord of all.