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October 30, 2011

**“Gotta Go Through It”
“Wet Feet”**

Joshua 3:7-17

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187072184>

Chilson Hills Church
Howell, MI

He had been here before.

David had. When David stepped out to face Goliath, as you saw earlier, he may have looked like a weak little rookie. But looks are deceiving. This little shepherd boy was a veteran at facing giants and long odds.

He had been there before.

Sure, there were aspects about this particular confrontation that were unique. David had never fought a 9 foot giant, had never fought on a battlefield either, and had never taken on a Philistine before, let alone a Philistine champion. And it's safe to say that he had never been in a situation where the stakes were as high as this.

But while David was inexperienced as a soldier, he had faced a lion in the fields, threatening the lives of his sheep.

He had never used his sling to fire rocks at someone wearing heavy armor and carrying a formidable shield. But, he had faced a bear with nothing but his bare hands, pummeling it until it ran away.

David, the shepherd who would one day be a king, had been here before.

He had been in a position where he was overmatched physically, the odds were against him and doubts outweighed optimism.

It was a story not unlike the one that was read previously from Joshua 3. The Israelites stand before the giant Jordan River. On the other side is The Promised Land, the home they had journeyed for more than 40 years to reach.

There are enemies on the other side of that river: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perzzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. They had never faced these people before, they had never been this far, this was a new country with new challenges and new opportunities.

But there was something familiar about all of this.

They had been here before.

They had at one time, stood before a large body of water, wondering how or if they could cross it. Except that time, it was The Red Sea.

For the past 7 weeks we have been looking through the book of Exodus, reading about the Israelite people and how they handled the obstacles as they journeyed to The Promised Land.

And we've been using the story of "The Bear Hunt" as a metaphor - the song or story Pastor Swink told for many years to the children of this church during Vacation Bible School.

On this "Bear Hunt" you faced various obstacles and at each obstacle everyone would say out loud – "you can't go over it, can't go under it and can't around it – you gotta go through it."

So it was for The Israelites who after being freed from Egypt came to The Red Sea – they had to wait on God and see God push back the waters; and they got through it.

They came to a place where they complained about a lack of food – they got through it learning that God provided for all their needs.

They came to a place where there was no water and they were thirsty – they got through that as well, discovering that God cares for us when we feel abandoned and lost.

They came to a place where they faced God in all of his terrifying glory – and they discovered that God was more than just a scary divine being that shook mountains. God was also loving, compassionate, patient and tender.

And the Israelites came to a place where their future was uncertain and mysterious. And Moses

discovered that we don't have to know everything, we just need to see God's back, knowing that God is leading us and carrying us.

And now, after all they had been through, they came to a river. A large, great river that stretched from a distant point in the North, to the Dead sea in the South. It was wide and it was deep. They couldn't turn back, they couldn't go around it, they couldn't go under it, they couldn't go over it. They had to go through it.

But there doesn't seem to be any fear in the Israelites, no doubts or complaints expressed. They don't seem to be nervous. Why?

Because they had been here before.

And they probably figured that if God had led them through a body of water like The Red Sea, and if God could lead them through all those previous obstacles, then God could certainly lead them through this as well.

This is why Joshua and the people don't seem nervous when God told Joshua to send the priests out to middle of the river with the precious "Ark of the Covenant."

That's right, "The Ark." You know - that golden chest with two winged creatures on the top that Indiana Jones lifted with two poles. It was more like a chest. It held sacred relics and was believed to be like God's earthly throne. More importantly it was the tangible, physical reminder that God was right there, right there in the midst of the Israelites.

God wanted the priests to carry that Ark - along with one man from each tribe of Israel – out to the middle of the river and "the water will stop flowing and pile up as if someone had built a dam across the river (CEV)."¹

This was new. This was different from the other challenges. Before, when God parted the sea, they

had to wait, trust and "be still." But now, they were supposed to take the first step into the roaring river. The Promised Land waited for them on the other side, but they had to take the risk. Their past experiences told them to have patience and trust that God would act.

Now, they were told to step out of convention and try something new, something fresh.

Recently I heard a story about Bobby Fischer, the legendary boy wonder, chess champion. Bobby is 13 years old, wearing a T-shirt and he's up against another chess champion named Donald Byrne, who is a prototypical, sophisticated intellectual wearing a jacket and a bow tie.

At first, it seemed as if Byrne would win easily. Bobby made some apparent early mistakes early in the match.

And then, Bobby does the unthinkable: he allows Byrne to take his queen.

A small crowd gathers around to watch Byrne put Bobby in his place. Byrne takes the queen beginning his systematic eradication of young Bobby Fischer.

But then, in four stunning moves, Bobby somehow is able to check Byrne.

20 moves later, after relentlessly chasing him around the board... Checkmate. Bobby had him – he had defeated Donald Byrne. A stunning upset in the world of chess.

People still talk about this today. Yes, they talk about the fact that Bobby was only 13 when he was able to do this, but they talk more about his crazy, amazing, risky move: sacrificing his queen. They talk about his willingness to defy convention and expectations.

This is what The Israelites did by sending their most promising leaders out into a rushing river with their

¹ V. 13

most precious possession. They were “sacrificing their queen” with nothing but a crazy prediction that the water will pile up for them.

This time, instead of the people waiting for God, God was waiting for them. God was waiting for them to get their feet wet.

And so, we read, the Israelites packed up their camp and approached the swollen river. Their leaders marched on ahead with the priests in the front.

And the text says that “as soon as the feet of the priests touched the water, the river stopped flowing and the water started piling up” just like God said that it would. The water upstream stopped flowing and the feet that risked getting wet were now standing on a dry riverbed.

And the people crossed over; just like they did before.

They had been here before.

The other day, I was talking to Pastor Swink on the phone, sharing with him the challenges our congregation is currently facing.

Loss of key staff members, loss of key leaders, major renovations, new leaders – you name it we’re facing it.

And David shared with me something that I needed to hear and I think you need to hear as well.

We’ve been through this before.

He reminded me of the time back in the early 80’s when the church was about 50 or 60 members still depending on support from our denomination as a mission congregation.

Stan Green the church’s first moderator and a key leader from the early days passed away unexpectedly. Rick Kontz, another key leader died

shortly after that leaving the church in midst of a second major building project.

He reminded me of a time within the last decade when several key leaders had to relocate because of the flagging economy or the retirement.

He reminded me of the times when our budget was struggling or a time when beloved staff members resigned.

“We’ve been through this before,” he told me.

And he’s right you know. You have been through this before. It was a different time, a different leader and a different challenge. But you have been through this before.

And I know that there are some of you facing different challenges. It’s not a river or a sea, but it’s a chronic illness, it’s a relationship, it’s another month of unemployment, it’s a bill to pay, it’s a test to take, a bully at school, or a day of work.

I want to tell you... You’ve been through this before.

It’s not exactly like other challenges you’ve faced, but there is not one challenge you are facing today or will face in the future that you are not prepared for. Do you hear me?!

You are more than prepared for any daunting task, any giant obstacle, or your frightening future. God has prepared you for everything you are going through or will go through. You only need to be willing to remember God’s faithfulness, take the step and get your feet wet.

North Jackson and Ft. Payne are rival high schools in North Alabama. Neither school is very big nor did they have very good basketball teams back in 1993 either. But in on one magical winter night, they played an unforgettable game.

It was one of those games that had been dominated by the officials. 84 fouls were called in the game.

North Jackson, the smaller of the two schools, only had 10 players on their squad, and the whistle of the referees eventually began to take its toll on their team.

As the game entered the final 5 minutes, five players from North Jackson had fouled out of the game. In the final minute, they were down to 4.

Somehow they were able to tie the game and send it into overtime losing yet another player to fouls. But miraculously, North Jackson was only down by 3 points.

Another player fouled out and then another. The North Jackson coach called a timeout with 10 seconds to go, a tie game and two players left to play – Chad Cobb and Big Robert Collier.

A futile play was scribbled out and the horn sounded. Time to play. North Jackson had the ball, and Big Robert looked over at Chad and said, “It’s just like backyard ball, Chad, just like backyard ball.”

You see, Chad and Robert had played two on five before in their back yard. Chad was the quick one and Robert was the big one. And the duo could take on just about anyone –even if they were severely outnumbered.

When they took the court they remembered that they had been through this before.

Big Robert somehow got the ball to Chad who was surrounded by four Ft. Payne players. Somehow Chad split two of the defenders and headed down the court, sprinting as fast as he could, weaving and winding between and behind Ft. Payne players.

Chad neared the rim, leapt and laid the ball off the glass.

The ball bounced on the rim... and off. But running down the court was Big Robert who rose to gather the ball in his big, soft hands

He pumped once, and went up with the ball to lay it off the glass one more time.

This time the ball fell through. The buzzer sounded, and North Jackson won the game.

Pandemonium!

Two had just beaten five because they remembered that they had been here before.

As a church we have our share of challenges in the future. We have a bold budget before us, and we have to decide whether or not we want to move ahead with this bold budget of if we want to play it safe. Your pledge cards will answer that question.

And as individuals you must remember the same thing Big Robert and Chad remembered – you have been through this before!

You are ready to handle what you are about to face! God is with you! Is it beginning a new career? Or quitting your job? Is it a move? Is it a bill to pay? Is it a test to take or a treatment to receive? Don’t be afraid! God is with you!

You can’t go over that challenge. You can’t go under it. You can’t go around it. You’ve got to go through it.

Now, go get your feet wet and take a step.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

For Sunday, October 30, 2011's Sermon

Foundational Scripture: Joshua 3:7-17

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187072184>

Featured Scripture Reflection: ⁷ The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses." ⁸ Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: "When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there." – **Joshua 3:7, 8** <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187073051>

Opening Questions: Share about a time when you read or heard a message from Scripture that challenged you. Share about a time when you sensed God comforting you through the words of Scripture.

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read **Joshua 1:1-9**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187073074> What stands out to you about this passage? What does this passage tell you about God? What does this passage tell you about Joshua?
- Read **Joshua 3:7-17**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187073100> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? How does it compliment the previous passage?
- Read **Matthew 28:18-20**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187073125> Think about what you've just read. How does it relate to the previous passages?

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the "Good News" in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me?

God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?

A prayer

God, you have brought us through many challenges. We trust you to help us and provide for us as we continue to follow your will for our lives.