

HOW TO RESPOND TO OUR WONDER-WORKING GOD (Joshua 3-4)

Our fair city of Enid is blessed to have a top-notch children's museum. Leonardo's celebrated its grand opening in 1995, and according to its website, every year since then it has welcomed between 70,000 to 80,000 people.

I might have driven through Enid once or twice before, but my first time to visit and stop in Enid, OK was when I accompanied my daughter on a school field trip to Leonardo's Children's Museum. That was more than 20 years ago.

At the time, my family and I were living in Stillwater, but Stillwater didn't have a children's museum. One got started 10 to 15 years ago, but in 2020, it closed its doors. A lot of bad things happened in 2020. The name of Stillwater's children's museum was Wondertorium. That is an interesting name. It combines two words—*wonder* and *auditorium*. The museum was a place where people could gather to experience the scientific and other wonders of our wondrous world.

The word *wonder* is used often in the Bible. The ESV Bible, which I preach from, uses the words *wonder*; *wonders*, *wonderful*, and *wondrous*, a total of 106 times. Those words are mostly used to describe what God has done. Only rarely is that word used to address what we are wondering.

Here is something about which I wonder: How often do you catch a glimpse of the wonders God has worked?

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote: "Earth's crammed with heaven. And every common bush afire with God: But only he who sees takes off his shoes."

Where have you seen the glory and wonders of God bursting forth in this world? I've seen it in nature. You have, too. You've seen it in a beautiful sunrise or sunset, in a field blanketed with wildflowers, in a mountain capped with snow, and in a forest where the trees point toward the heavens. You've seen God's wonders on a clear night with the stars twinkling, and heavenly bodies reflecting the light of our sun.

You have seen God's wondrous works when you gaze upon a newborn baby. You see him yawn. You see her stretch. You hear them coo, and you think of Psalm 139:14 where David erupts in worship and writes, "I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well."

Sometimes we read of God's wonders. That is easily done when we carefully examine the text of both the Old and New Testaments. We are also confronted with God's wonders when we consult a history book or read the morning newspaper.

God still works wonders in this world today. Every time a person comes to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, God does the wonder of new birth, the wonder of justification, and the wonder of life transformation has just begun.

How are we to respond to this wonder-working God? Worship, praise, adoration? Those are fitting responses when we behold the wonders God has performed. There are, however, some other responses. These additional responses are the ones we will look at as we skim the verses of Joshua 3 and 4. Look with me at Joshua 3:1, 5. Here, God through the lips of His chosen leader makes a promise to His people. The promise is that He will do wonders among them.

From these two chapters, I want to make two simple statements.

Before God Does Wonders for You, Obey Him

When I prepare a message, I often consult what other preachers have said about the text in the sermons they have preached. I did a quick search, and I only found one sermon. It was preached in 1990. That was 33 years ago. When I was 26, I preached a sermon on Joshua 3. I still have the notes of that message, and I want to share three truths from that message that help us to do what God wants us to do before He works wonders among us and for us, all of which deal with obedience.

1. Follow God Reverently.

Look at vv. 2-4. The people were instructed to follow the Ark of the Covenant and the priests who carried it, but they were to lag behind roughly 1000 yards, about half a mile. Why such a distance?

Let's first consider what the ark was, what it represented. The ark is mentioned nine times alone in this third chapter. What was it? It's not Noah's Ark that is referenced here. It wasn't a big boat. It was a wooden box overlaid with gold. It was about 3 feet, 9 inches long, and 2 feet, 3 inches both wide and high. It had a lid made of pure gold with figures of angels facing each other. It was carried by priests using poles. Rings were attached to the four corners of the ark, and poles were inserted through the rings. Only certain priests were allowed to carry the ark. Inside the ark were several artifacts including the two tablets of stone on which were engraved the Ten Commandments.

One of the key features of the ark was the lid. It was called the mercy seat. It was viewed as the throne of God on earth. Most importantly, the ark symbolized the presence of God among His people.

By following the ark as it was carried by the priests, the people were symbolically following God and by following it from a distance, they were following God reverently.

I am afraid that we have become too careless and too casual in our relationship with God. God is not your buddy. He is not your pal. God is the Creator of heaven and earth. In the first chapter of Revelation, John tells us that he was afforded a vision of Jesus in heaven. When he saw Jesus in His glory, John reports that he "fell at His feet as though a dead man" (Revelation 1:17). What he did not do is that he did not run up to Jesus and give Him a high five.

I don't want to be dogmatic about this because I realize God looks at the heart and not the externals, but when I was growing up, I was taught that when you attend worship you dress up for the occasion. If you were invited by the Governor to the Governor's mansion for dinner, you wouldn't show up in old jeans and a ratty t-shirt. That wouldn't be appropriate.

I realize that dressing down for church is in vogue, but we have lost something. I am not saying you must wear suits and ties or long dresses with heels. I am just saying that worshiping God in the company of His people is a special occasion. It is a holy meeting. It is not like going to a football game or the local dollar store.

We should also take care as to how we speak about God and to God. He is not the

man upstairs or the big guy in the sky. He is the King. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. Angels surround His throne singing, “Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). Don’t run into His presence. Be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10).

Follow Him. We use the word “follow” about celebrities. We use digital devices and social media to follow famous people. We want to know what they are saying and what they are doing.

We don’t follow God in such a casual and uncommitted way. We follow God by learning and doing what He has commanded us to do.

When you do that, you can be certain that God is going to show up, and He will do wonders for you, through you, and in you.

There is a second thing God wants us to do.

2. *Commit to God Fully.*

Look again at v. 5. My version uses the word *consecrate*. Some other translations have used *sanctify*, *purify*, *dedicate*, *prepare*. It has to do with setting yourself apart for God’s purposes.

God will not work for and through half-hearted believers. We need to be whole-hearted Christians who are fully committed to God.

Sadly, not all Christians are. I have heard Christians compared to:

- **Wheelbarrows:** They are not good unless pushed.
- **Canoes:** They need to be paddled to get them going.
- **Kites:** They fly away unless kept on a string.
- **Kittens:** They are content as long as you pet them.
- **Footballs:** You never know which way they will bounce.
- **Balloons:** They are full of air and ready to blow up at any time.
- **Trailers:** They must be pulled along.
- **Lights Switches:** They keep going on and off.

I have said before that we need to be like toothbrushes. Your toothbrush is dedicated to one person. The family doesn’t have a community toothbrush. You wouldn’t knock on your neighbor’s door and ask to borrow his or her toothbrush. Your toothbrush is dedicated for one purpose. Likewise, we need to be committed to God alone and for His glory alone.

In addition to following Him reverently and being committed to Him fully . . .

3. *Hear God Willingly.*

Notice v. 9. The time came for the people to cross over the Jordan from the east side to the west side. Now that it was time, Joshua called them to come close to hear God’s promise. We find the promise in v. 10.

The promise they heard, no doubt, greatly encouraged the people. It motivated them to continue with the task before them. It assured them of final victory.

God’s word assures us of victory, too. We read in 1 Cor. 15:57, “But thanks be to God,

who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

God’s word is certainly a two-edged sword. Sometimes it convicts us of our sin. It points out weaknesses in our lives, areas in which we need to repent and to grow.

God’s word, however, is still the Gospel. It is still Good News and should be preached as such. The Bible should not be used as a hammer to hit people over the head. It should be used as a medicine that brings healing.

Paul wrote, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

If you can’t leave a worship service here having been encouraged, something went wrong. Either I didn’t use the Word well, or you didn’t hear the Word well.

Why is it that many believers actively avoid reading the Bible or hearing it preached? I can’t explain that. Maybe they are used to listening to a preacher use the Bible as a club to beat them up. That is not my job, and that is not my goal. I have been tasked to preach Good News. Who doesn’t want to hear Good News?

Before God did wonders among His people in Joshua’s day, He wanted them to follow Him reverently, commit to Him fully, and hear Him willingly. That is how we obey.

If we do those very things, God will do wonders among us, as well. How do I know that? I know that because of what I read in 2 Chronicles 16:9. In that verse, Hanani, the seer went to King Asa and made him this promise, “For the eyes of YHWH run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him.” I encourage you, be that man; be that woman; be that young person. Follow Him. Commit to Him. Listen to Him. If you do that, God will work strongly on your behalf; He will work wonders for you.

What wonder did God do for the people in Joshua’s day? It was time to cross the Jordan River, but there was a problem. It was the rainy season. The river was swollen. It had overrun its banks. It was at flood stage.

In v. 13 Joshua told the people what would happen. Then, in vv. 15-17 we are informed that it did happen. Now what? That brings me to the second statement. The first was, before God does wonders on your behalf, obey Him.

After God Does Wonders for You, Remember

Remember what? Remember God. Remember what He said; remember what He did.

In Joshua 4 God gives instructions to Joshua about a memorial He wants erected. One man from each of the twelve tribes was to select a stone from out of the Jordan River. Joshua then took those stones and erected the memorial. The purpose of a memorial is to help people remember an important person or a significant event.

I have never been to Washington D.C., but there are a host of memorials in our nation’s capital. There is the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, as well as the FDR Memorial. There are also monuments to the veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Those are just seven, and there are many other notable monuments.

As we think about the monument that was erected on the west bank of the Jordan

River, we need to consider who would benefit from it. The generation entering the land was the first to need the monument. They had a difficult task ahead of them. That memorial would serve as a reminder and an encouragement. Look at the beginning of 4:6. Over time, people tend to forget. We need reminders of what God has done on our behalf.

As v. 6 continues and on through v. 7, we see that the memorial would benefit the next generation. Joshua continued this theme in vv. 20-23.

There was one last group who would benefit from the memorial. Look at v. 24. The memorial was meant to be a testimony to the world that God is real.

There is a sense in which you and I are to be audio/visual aids that convey the truth about who God is both to the next generation and the world around us. Our job is not to erect a standing stone; we are to be standing stones. People should be able to hear and see us and come to know who God is.

Just as God ordered Joshua to erect a memorial, Jesus commanded His followers to observe a memorial. We call it the Lord's Supper. It reminds us of what Jesus did on our behalf. It tells the story of His death on the cross and how He shed His blood to atone for our sin. *Atone* means *to cover*. His blood covers and takes away our sin when we trust Him.

I invite our deacons to come forward as we remember . . .