

## **“For you have not passed this way before!”**

Joshua 3:4

### **Introduction:**

Since we are closer to the end of this day than its beginning, I want to ask a few questions for you to reflect upon.

Did you expect your plans for today to work out?

What did you do to help them come about beyond planning and preparing for them?

How positive were you that they would come about?

Did you pursue your plans persistently throughout the day?

These questions prove important when we think of today and the future in light of James' statement in 4:13-15, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'"

Each day we are blessed to experience is new, yet we can face each day with confidence and expectations.

We may choose the location, the time, the activity, and the desired results of our plans, but we do not have such control over our lives as to direct our existence.

Will we be alive tomorrow?

If we are alive and aware tomorrow, we need to draw near to God.

James 4:6-10 tells us to humble ourselves and God will bless us with grace and lift us to a position of privilege and honor, submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee, also repent and God will draw near to us.

The best of plans, with the greatest amount of detail (v. 13), still face the reality James 4:14 reminds readers about, no one knows what tomorrow will bring.

Therefore, as James instructs in verse fifteen, "[we] ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'"

Joshua 3 tells how Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River.

A review of the text reveals a design for navigating life.

For them, it was life in a new land, for us it is life in a new day.

Read with me Joshua 3:1-13. Reading again verses 2-4.

What is so important about the Ark of the Covenant?

It represented the person and promises of God.

It pointed to the fact that as the Israelites set out to cross the Jordan, invade the territory, and possess the land, they must do so not in their strength, but in God's strength, for it was God Himself whose presence and power was going before them as their source of victory.

This is good teaching for all of life.

We must fix our eyes on God and follow Him each day to be victorious.

We go in His strength; His presence and power make a difference in our plans and the outcome of them.

We depend on God for the future.

The reason being—For [we] have not passed this way before!

Acknowledging such is great but what are we to do about it?

## **I. Plan purposefully, for you have not passed this way before.**

The apostle Paul's fixation on living for Christ would only be improved with his gainful death (Philippians 1:21).

In Philippians 3:13 and 14 Paul said, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul's purpose was clear as it should be for every Christian.

Christ was living in Paul, so Paul was living for Christ in anticipation of being like him in his death which would bring forth his resurrection and the completion of his salvation.

Galatians 2:20 succinctly states our purposeful plan for living, "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Christ must be our all; He must be our sole purpose in life.

If the children of Israel had not planned a space between them and "the ark of the covenant of the LORD" (Joshua 3:4) things could have turned out very differently.

Do you remember Uzzah?

The Ark of the Covenant was being transported in an unauthorized manner but when it moved, instinctively, "Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it."

Uzzah's conscientious effort to protect the ark actually defiled it.

2 Samuel 6:7 reports, "And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God."

"For the third time in the books of Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 5:3–12; 6:19–20 [2 Samuel 6:1–8]), the Lord had demonstrated that he was capable of defending the ark."<sup>1</sup>

If we do not plan purposefully to live for Christ, according to His direction and allowance, things will turn out very differently for us at the judgment and in eternity.

## **II. Prepare prayerfully, for you have not passed this way before.**

History describes James, the brother of our Lord, as having knees like a camel—due to being on them in much prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Prayer is like quietly opening a door and slipping into the presence of God.

In prayer we can seek help in planning, preparing, and performing plans.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 330.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius of Caesaria, "[The Church History of Eusebius](#)," in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 125.

"He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place; for he wore not woolen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>"The dramatic account of James by Hegesippus is an overdrawn picture from the middle of the second century, colored by Judaizing traits which may have been derived from the *Ascents of James*, and other Apocryphal sources. He turns James into a Jewish priest and Nazarite saint (cf. his advice to Paul, Acts 21:23, 24), who drank no wine, ate no flesh, never shaved nor took a bath, and wore only linen. But the Biblical James is Pharisaic and legalistic, rather than Essenic and ascetic" (Schaff, *Ch. Hist.* I. p. 268). For Peter's asceticism, see the Clementine *Recognitions*, VII. 6; and for Matthew's, see Clement of Alexandria's *Pædagogus*, II. 1.

Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.”

Trust everything, every action, deed, and undertaking to the LORD, and your plans will turn out well.

Hebrews 4:16 admonishes, “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

We should confidently speak to God knowing He will be kind to us and show us His love, helping us when we need Him.

Prayer should precede everything; it must be our priority.

Paul instructed in 1 Timothy 2:1, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men.”

“First of all,” as used here, identifies prayers of various kinds to be of utmost importance.

The Bible is God talking to humanity; prayer is us talking to God.

The children of Israel needed to “know the way by which [they] must go.”

God instructed Joshua to cross the Jordan (1:2).

He promised Joshua His power and presence (v. 5).

He promised Joshua His possession and protection (vv. 3, 4, 6, and 7).

In prayer, we can request God’s direction and in His answer to our prayers, we can “know the way by which [we] must go,” so prepare prayerfully.

### **III. Proceed positively, for you have not passed this way before.**

The right attitude is crucial and priceless.

Leo Buscaglia (Boo-sky-a), an American author and motivational speaker said, “Don’t spend your precious time asking, ‘Why isn’t the world a better place? It will only be time wasted. The question to ask is ‘How can I make it better?’ To that there is an answer.”

Asking the right questions and getting the correct answers grant us control of our part in life.

Positive Christianity shines the brightest at home because it shines farther throughout the world.

The “I can” attitude will certainly result in an outcome focused on heaven (Philippians 4:13).

When Christ is the source of our strength, then we are confident that God will meet our needs (Philippians 4:19).

When we plan purposefully and prepare prayerfully, we have good reason to proceed positively.

God accomplishes His purposes, so when our purpose aligns with His purpose, we will accomplish what we set our affections on.

God already “know[s] the way by which [we] must go.”

What better leader can we have?

Where He leads, I will follow; Follow Jesus ev’ry day.

Where He leads me, I will follow, I’ll go with Him, with Him all the way.

Romans 8:28 builds our confidence because “we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

God works in our favor and answers prayers; we can be assured of these two things for the future; therefore, we can proceed positively.

#### **IV. Pursue persistently, for you have not passed this way before.**

Anything worth doing is worth doing right and with all our might.

Colossians 3:17 instructs, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

And verse twenty-three directs, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Solomon, the wise man, said, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

A godly life is comparable to a great race as the writer of Hebrews 12:1 and 2 states, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

One of the identifying marks of persistence is endurance.

Pursuable persistence is characterized by unity, humility, and service (Philippians 2:1-4).

Such is the content of the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5).

Keep your eyes on God, follow the path He directs (Proverbs 3:6), and trust Him to accurately lead you as you pursue persistently.

#### **Application:**

Everyone needs God’s guidance every day.

If we wish to live successfully, we need to follow His guidance, for we have never passed through life before.

Plan purposefully to follow God closely.

Prepare prayerfully to be ready for each day’s task.

Proceed positively in strength, assurance, and expectation in God.

Pursue persistently the duty of believers, dependence on God’s provisions, and direction from the Divine.

#### **Conclusion:**

God’s marvelous plan of salvation mimics this design for life.

God plans to save those who follow Him according to His divine purpose (Ephesians 1).

His Son will not be ashamed to call those who prepare themselves in Him, brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11).

Everyone who belongs to Christ proceeds forward “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13), “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10), and “according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

Therefore, followers of God “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11) and also pursue “peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

Since you have not passed this way before, will you obey God’s design for earthly life?

Will you obey God’s plan for salvation?

Believe and trust Him.

Repent of the sins you have committed.

Confess that you believe Jesus is the Son of God.

Be baptized into Christ.

Following God’s plan will surely lead to eternal life!