

Life's Thresholds
Joshua 3-4
May 5, 2026

Please open your Bibles today to Joshua 3. Today we celebrate important milestones in the lives of many of our young people. We have recognized graduations from various stages of their educational journeys, from preschool all the way up to college. To graduate means to complete **part** of a journey, it is measured advancement along a longer pathway, and as much as our high school and college graduates may not want to hear it, it indicates not final arrival but the beginning of the **next** phase, the **next** leg of your journey. To commence means to begin something new so the commencement exercises at the various schools celebrate the movement of students into the **next** new things.

Say Graduation. One student said the weather for his graduation ceremony was just like his grades, unpredictable. Another said High school graduation is like the end of a 12-year prison sentence, but with better snacks. Hopefully, you graduates believe the tassel was worth the hassle. I'd like to suggest that these graduations are, if you will, like crossing thresholds. The thresholds of our homes are dividing lines between the inside and the outside and within our homes, there are thresholds between the various rooms. Each of us crossed a threshold today when we came from the fellowship hall into the sanctuary.

In similar way, our preschoolers crossed their first educational threshold, and the kindergarteners the second. Our elementary students have crossed the third, and so forth. The truth I want us to grasp is that each threshold is an entry into a **new** room of life. And to help us understand how God wants us to move from room to room let's look at what happened when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. Forty years earlier they had crossed a threshold as they left Egypt as newly freed slaves. Because of their fear and disobedience, they sadly spent 40 years wondering around a room God had only intended for them to spend a few months in. But now, having prepared them with His Law, with new leaders and renewed faith, they were ready to finally cross over into their next new room.

If you are able, please stand as we read a bit about that crossing from Joshua 3. 1 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. 2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 3 giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. 4 Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it." 5 Joshua told the people, "Consecrate

yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." 6 Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them. For the sake of time, skip to verse 14 So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 15 Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 16 the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Say Here we go! After 40 years in the desert, they're about to enter a land flowing with milk and honey! The Promised Land! Some of our graduates feel that way. After all their years in school, they're finally entering the land of milk and honey. But as you make this transition, let's see what we can learn from the Israelites' transition. And those of us who are not graduating can also learn, for life is full of thresholds. Every newlywed husbands would often carry his bride across the threshold into their new home. But we also cross thresholds into new jobs, into new communities, into new homes, into new friendships, into new phases of our careers, into parenthood, into grandparenthood, into retirement. Etc. God always has us on the move. It was when the Israelites settled down and became comfortable when they began forsaking God, chasing idols, and neglecting their Source, their God.

So the Israelites are perched on the east side of the Jordan River. It was 10th day of the first Hebrew month which would be about the first of April. It's springtime and the river is at flood stage. The spring rains combined with snowmelt up on Mt. Herman have flowed downstream to create a raging river. There's no bridge. They don't have amphibious vehicles. They have children and baggage. How will they get across? God says, "I've got this. The priests will go first and carry the Ark of the Covenant into the river and as soon as their feet touch the water, it will stop flowing."

The oldest of these people were just children when they saw God split the threshold of the Red Sea, but if He could do that, He could certainly do this. And He did. The water stood up in a heap upstream while all of them crossed the threshold into the new land. There's evidence of earthquakes upstream in the area where this took place and similar situations have happened since. You can trust God's Word.

But I want us to notice the priority in their crossing. Number 1, keep God first! The priests and the Ark represented their relationship with God and they were to lead the column. Graduates, the rest of us, as we cross life's thresholds, keep God first! He is the

only One with the power to stop our raging rivers, to split our deep seas, and to usher us safely across. If you try to do this without Him, you will fail. Period. Even if you succeed financially, in your job, or in whatever other way, if you do it without Him, it's still failure. For God created you for relationship with Him. In fact, the whole reason He was giving them this new land was not just to make their lives better, but that they might worship and obey Him, that they might actually be people He created them to be!

My brothers and sisters, God opens doors for us to cross thresholds so that we can draw closer to Him, and doing so, that we might be the obedient people of God He wants us to be! Not to leave Him behind. Not to make it on our own without Him. In the new land they were to eventually set up a place to worship and Joshua built an altar on Mt. Ebal for just that. Other altars were built as well until a few hundred years later, when Solomon built the temple at Jerusalem. We must make worship a priority in whatever room of life's house we're in. In whatever threshold we cross, the first priority and highest is to honor God.

Verse 4 also directs them to follow the ark because they had never been that way before. Whenever we cross a threshold we enter a new room, a new land, a new phase where we've never been before. We need God to lead us! Jesus goes before us in all things. Follow Him!

Now in crossing the Jordan, these Israelites had to leave their old lives behind. That may sound obvious, but think for a minute what that meant. God had been handfeeding them every day for the last 40 years. All they had to do every morning was to go out and pick up breakfast at no cost and with no plowing, no planting, no weeding, no harvesting. Free groceries every single day. That stopped the very moment they crossed the Jordan River. From now on, they would have to participate in their own support and graduates, so will you. In your land of milk and honey, you will have to make your money! That's not a bad thing, it's a good thing! It's a blessing to plant, grow, and harvest! Hard work is its own reward! But it's still hard work.

Suddenly their shoes would start wearing out. For 40 years, their Nikes never rotted, cracked, or broke. Their Birkenstocks didn't break. Now they would and they'd have to make or buy their own shoes. Not a bad thing at all. I'm sure some of them were very tired of their old shoes. But they would now have to take responsibility they didn't have before. As we cross thresholds in life, God often expects us to assume greater responsibility. He's still our Provider but He requires, invites, and allows us to participate with Him. Life's a bit different on the other side of the threshold. Wise parents prepare their children by gradually giving them more and more responsibility all along the way so that they're prepared when these times come.

Another thing we know from God's promise to Abraham is that they were to be a blessing to the others around them. And so are we. God doesn't give us opportunities,

gifts, income, jobs, and blessings for us to hoard for ourselves, but to share with others. With those who may not have had the same privileges we have. In Africa and in Haiti, they have to pay to go to school. Can we use some of the money God blesses us with to help them? Can we encourage and pray for our neighbors? Can we help Family Promise help others? Can we support the Free Clinic and the Pregnancy Center? We probably can't do all, but we can and should do something. Israel was to become a light on a hill that would glorify God and share light with all those around. Certainly our churches should be that, but so also should our homes and our individual lives. It's not just about us.

One of the other things we know from this story is that this crossing was not the end of their journey nor the end of their struggles. They would have new challenges on the west side of the Jordan. The first of which was a strong secure city called Jericho! They would have to face their fears, crank up their courage, and deepen their faith to follow God's battle plan. And they did. Once again, the priests, carrying the Ark went first. Oh hear me, today, let God go before you in all things! Don't ever get in front of Him! Don't leave Him back on the other side of the threshold! Too often graduates leave God behind as they strike out on their own. Christ's own Body the Church gets left behind because the graduates are now too smart for God, too busy for God, or too consumed with all the beauty of the new room they've just entered. As the Israelites learned all too quickly in their second battle up at Ai, whenever you think you don't need God, whenever you think you can succeed without obeying Him, you find out pretty quickly how painful and how stupid, how costly, and how deadly that can be.

I want you to understand that you will face new battles, new struggles, new obstacles. Don't think it will all be smooth sailing, rainbows, and unicorns. If you thought SOLs and final exams were hard, wait till you take some of life's exams. Some we ace, some we fail, and some we get Cs on. Those we fail, God usually requires us to take again till we learn.

Look back at the Scripture. Josh 4:1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, 2 "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." And they did. They built a memorial there. Vs 6 says these rocks were to be sign for them and, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

What's the lesson? Remember and celebrate how God brought you across your thresholds. Build memorials, take photos of graduation, hang up diplomas, set up retirement plaques, etc. Not to worship but as reminders of God's faithfulness in your

past. As reasons to worship the God who gave you those victories. As object lessons to witness to your children and others when they ask, what happened in this picture. Not just that I graduated from HS or college, but that's when God helped me finish 12 years of school or 4 years of college, or 5 or 6 or whatever. Or 40 years in my job. Memorials are important if they are put up to give God glory. Not to glorify self. Be careful! The sad thing is we have a tendency to turn such things into idols and worship our accomplishments which is worship of ourselves. If we hang a diploma, if we display a photo, if we set up a trophy, let's be VERY clear now and always about Whom it is to glorify like these stones on the west bank of the Jordan. And vs 9 says, they were still there till the day this book was written. My guess is they are still there somewhere and it wouldn't surprise me any if archaeologists find them one day. But whether they do or not, they were reminders of God's faithfulness to His people and so we also need to be reminded of God's faithfulness in helping us across our thresholds.

Notice too how, in verse 11, the waters started flowing again, at flood stage, as soon as all the people crossed over. Say no turning back. Even if they wanted to go back to manna and Mt. Sinai, they couldn't. They had to go forward. So too as we cross life's thresholds, God expects us to keep moving forward. One of the besetting sins of these people's parents is how they yearned for the food they ate back in Egypt, even though it was the food of slavery. That grumbling and complaining cost them dearly. Move forward! When Cortes landed in Mexico in 1519, he burned the ships they came in on so that his troops could not retreat. They could only fight forward. The Israelites had to face Jericho, they could not flee back across the Jordan. It wouldn't open for a retreat, only for an advance. Yes, life will be hard. Some battles will be very tough. Press on! With Jesus! Graduation, new jobs, new friendships, even retirement, are all chances to get a fresh start, a new beginning, using what we've learned from our past-both good and bad, to hopefully make the future better for us and others. The parents of these Israelites had messed up, this was a chance for them to do better as they crossed the Jordan's threshold.

Eventually, for those who are in Jesus there will be one **final** threshold to cross and that will be when we pass from this life to the next. From earth to heaven. What a joyful crossing that will be! No more battles to fight! No more struggles to win, and to worship directly in the presence of God Himself!

But that only will happen if we've previously crossed the threshold into His Kingdom here. Not everyone will cross into heaven at death. As we learned a few weeks ago, those who have rejected Jesus will cross the threshold of death, but it will be into eternal misery. The everlasting room of suffering in hell. At that moment it will be too late to go back across the river and change our choice. The river that separates time from eternity will be at flood stage never again to be crossed. The time to choose Jesus is now.

He crossed the threshold of heaven to come to earth and then He grew and went through various rooms of life just as we do. He was an infant, then a child, then a teen, then a young adult, then an adult. And He crossed the threshold of death when we hung Him on the cross. He descended into Hell where He wrestled the keys of eternity out of the hands of the Devil and then He crossed back over the threshold by rising from the dead to offer eternal life to all who will receive it. I encourage you to receive it today. Education is wonderful but it will not save you. Retirement is fantastic, they tell me, but it is not eternal. Heaven is and there's only one threshold you can cross to get there, and that is by confessing your sins, repenting and turning from them and asking Jesus to save you. If you never have, you're not ready for any other threshold. Do that today as we pray.