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Intro. Certain moments & events in life bring a sense of anticipation, whether it’s going to Disney World for the first time, getting married, graduating, landing that dream job, becoming a home owner & more. We don’t know what the future holds, but when we imagine the possibilities, we may move forward in anticipation of something great. In the movie “The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey,” Bilbo Baggins had been asked to join a group of dwarves on a quest to reclaim their former home, but Bilbo wanted nothing of it. He awakes the next morning in this scene (show clip, 2:15). Once Bilbo contemplated the possibilities, he was ready to go, anticipating a great adventure (& it certainly was!). Far greater than such a quest is the call of God on our lives to follow Him & anticipate His work in & through our lives. As we continue our series on “Moving Forward,” today we look at Joshua 3-4 & “Moving Forward: In Anticipation.”

Theme: Obedience & expectation

Background: After Moses died, God used Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land. He commanded him to be strong & courageous & the people began to support him. Joshua sent two spies into Jericho, a strong city near the Jordan River, to discover its weaknesses & Rahab the prostitute helped them & pledged her allegiance to Yahweh, the One True God.

Overview of the Narrative:

- This text is pretty straight forward: as Israel begins to enter into the Promised Land, God leads them through the ark of the covenant, symbolizing His Presence among them. God performs a great miracle by having the Jordan River stop flowing in the city of Adam, about 19 miles to the North of Gilgal, next to the Northern tip of the Dead Sea. The people then cross on dry ground & set up stones to remember God’s great work. All of this is in anticipation of Israel taking the land God promised to them, beginning with Abraham nearly 500 years earlier.
- As we make our way through Joshua & this message of “Moving Forward,” we need to remember God didn’t save us to make statues out of us but soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ
- Two ways we can anticipate moving forward in strength, courage & faith:

I. When You Obey the Lord, You Can Anticipate His Powerful Presence among You

- Obedience is key here, as we’ll see again in chapter 5 next time—they were to cross the Jordan to begin to take the Promised Land (“cross” occurs 22x & “Jordan” 24x—both central to the theme of these chapters)
- The “ark” is mentioned 17x in chapters 3-4 & it symbolized the presence of Yahweh among His people (cf. Exodus 33:14)
- The Lord is mentioned 21x in these two chapters, even “the living God” (3:10) & “the Lord of all the earth” (3:11, 13)—He is not only present but powerful
- Notice how the ark enters the Jordan first, symbolizing God going ahead of His people to lead them into Canaan, the Land of Promise
- While the Lord has promised us as believers to never leave us or forsake us, He especially promises to be with us to the end of the age as we obey Him in making disciples of all nations (cf. Matthew 28:19-20)
- Thus, His presence is always with the believer, but His powerful presence occurs in obedience to Him as He uses you to transform lives (through the relationship you have with unbelievers & the encouragement you can bring to believers who need help)

II. When You Obey the Lord, You Can Anticipate His Powerful Work around/through You

- I say “powerful work” because I mean more than His general work of blessing through the seasons on the calendar but that which only He could do

Illus: Most of the year, the Jordan River looks like this (show pic)—not much more than a creek, but there is a ravine or valley you have to descend & ascend to go from modern-day Jordan into Israel if you were to travel by foot without any bridges. During the Spring flood season, it could overflow to nearly one mile (2,000 cubits is a little more than one-half mile, so the people were probably at the water’s edge when the priests stood in the midst of the Jordan) & that’s when Israel approached it (they would begin their attack in the Spring so they had more time to fight before the cold Winter season came)

- The stopping of the Jordan River was similar to parting the Red Sea, because traveling through water or even mud would have slowed them significantly & left them vulnerable to attacks—just as Yahweh parted the Red Sea to deliver Israel from Egypt in the previous generation, Yahweh stopped the Jordan’s flow to give the new generation the promised inheritance
- So that the people wouldn’t forget the miracle & mighty work of God, the Lord had Joshua set up 12 stones (two piles)—one in Gilgal, just east of Jericho & the other in the Jordan River—stones of remembrance

Illus: When God blessed this church & allowed you to move to the North Campus, a few stones were set up & are next to the Prayer Chapel today—the stones of the Reformation (show pic)—now people think you have to be Reformed to believe these, but you don’t, for here’s what they teach—How is one right with God? By grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*sola Christos*) according to the Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) to the glory of God alone (*solus Deo Gloria*)

- Those stones are a reminder of God’s message of hope, but some have treated them like an object of worship or like their worship of God would be disturbed if those stones were removed—do you know what happened at Gilgal? Several things—Samuel’s ministry (1 Samuel 7:16), Israel’s crowning of Saul (1 Samuel 11), David’s welcoming after Absalom’s rebellion was subdued (2 Samuel 19), a “school of prophets” (2 Kings 2:1-2; 4:38), but then Judah made it a shrine & worshipped falsely at Gilgal rather than Jerusalem where the temple was (Hosea 4:15; 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5)—memorials are fine until they become religious idols & then they become a stench in the nostrils of God
- What’s the point of God’s mighty work? The last verse of this passage tells us—“that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever” (4:24)—fearing the Lord is the most common expression in the OT for biblical faith—God has done mighty works so that you may trust Him & the mightiest work He has done came in the death, burial & resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ

Conc. If you have read *The Hobbit* or watched the 3 movies, you know Bilbo Baggins certainly went on a great adventure. What he encountered was far greater than he anticipated. When you first come to Christ, you come to Him wanting forgiveness of sins & peace with God & eternal life. Then you begin to learn how He grows you through prayer, His Word, fellowship, ministry & more & the Christian life becomes more than you anticipated. If it isn’t a blessed life, it may be because you have never truly surrendered your life to Christ or you simply aren’t living the abundant life the Lord wants you to have. I’m not talking about prosperity-thinking but having the hand of God on your life as you serve Him wholeheartedly. Won’t you give yourself back in service to Him so that you can “Move Forward in Anticipation” of His work in your life?