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GOT ANY RIVERS YOU THINK ARE UNCROSSABLE?

Joshua: Obtaining Victory in the Christian Life
Joshua 3

The last time I talked in this book we talked about Rahab being adopted into the faith community; a beautiful picture of how God takes people with troubled pasts and invites them in to be a part of the faith community as God does in every one of our lives. It's a beautiful picture.

I have adopted children in my own life and it's taught me so much about what God does for us. He adopts us into His family. When you're adopted into the new family, you get new parents, you get new brothers and sisters, you get new rules to live by. You get a new birth certificate. Did you know that you get a new birth certificate when you get adopted? Wow. It's really interesting that God does similar things in our lives as we become part of His family.

That was a beautiful picture in Joshua chapter 2. Now we're going to go to Joshua chapter 3 today. Let's pray as we get started.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, out of this passage we ask that you would equip us and teach us, that you would give us insight into our own lives that would be helpful to us as we try to serve you. Lord, we all come with challenges in our lives and we know that you offer promises and you offer solutions and you offer peace to us. So we ask that you would give us a vision for that today as we study this passage. In Jesus' name, amen.

Joshua chapter 3. Today we're going to talk about crossing over the Jordan River. Remember the whole story of Joshua is a story about how Joshua leads the people into the Promised Land. Well today is the day that they cross over the Jordan River, a very significant part in the whole story.

Let's look at 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.* Now let me just explain this because the Jordan really is the context, geographically, for us today.

The Jordan is a river that runs about two hundred miles. It starts way up by Mount Hermon, comes down, and feeds into the Sea of Galilee. And then after it feeds into the Sea of Galilee, it runs sixty miles down to the Dead Sea, but it goes in a windy route back and forth. So if you were to take a string and put it on the Jordan River going back and forth and then stretch it out, it would be over a hundred miles. Sixty miles from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea. It's a drop in elevation of several hundred feet (six or seven hundred feet) from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea which is, of course, the lowest place in all of the world. It has no outlet to it. The water evaporates from there, but there's lots of water coming in, all kinds of silt and stuff in the water. It's really kind of a dirty river if you were to swim in it.

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In the Old Testament there's a story about a man who was told to go wash in the Jordan River. He was from up north, up in Damascus, and he says, "Well why can't I go in the beautiful rivers up there? How come I have to wash in this dirty river here?" God obviously wanted to teach him a lesson in humility by washing in the Jordan River.

It was Jesus who was baptized in the Jordan River. There were miracles that took place here. Both Elijah and Elisha did miracles in this Jordan River. Elisha actually spread the waters out and was able to see them part because he had the cloak of Elijah.

Today we're going to see a miracle take place as God is going to open up the waters of the Jordan and the people are going to walk across on dry ground. That's really the picture of what we see here in this story. Notice it says in verse 1, *Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan.* So from a few miles away from the Jordan, they went down to the actual Jordan where they could be camping by the water, where they could see the water out there. It was right there. They saw the boundary that prevented them from going into the Promised Land.

I just want to suggest that we examine our own lives, which is what I think we're doing here as we're studying the book of Joshua. We're looking at our own lives. What does God have for us? What are the promises He has out there? What does He want us to experience? What boundaries are preventing us from getting there that God might have us cross? I think that's the picture we want to have in our mind as we're going through this passage, trying to understand what it looks like in practical terms for our own lives.

So we've got this river that they're camping by. Notice verse 2. *After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 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.*

First of all, notice it says *after three days*. I just think there's sometimes when we know that God wants to deliver us, but we've got to wait the three days. Sometimes the waiting of the three days is difficult for us. You get announcements that people are going to get laid off on Friday and you have to wait till Friday to see who gets pink slips. It's a few days. You have a medical procedure done and you're waiting for the test to come back. It's a few days you have to wait. Sometimes we have to wait in that waiting period for God to provide the answers or even the next steps of what we need to do. That's what's happening.

They're down there; after three days they went through the camp, and it says, *"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.* Notice; who are they following? This is what I think is really important for each one of us. Who are they following? Are they following just the person in front of them? Are husbands following their wives or wives following their husbands? Are young people following their parents? No. He says, "When you see the ark out there, follow the ark."

It's very important for us to understand that God doesn't have grandchildren. You know what I mean by that, right? There's no step between us and God. Every one of us has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that brings us into God's family. We are all to be following the ark. We are all to be following God.

If you're a young person here today, I want you to know that your faith before God is very important. You want to grow your faith and have an independent faith from your parents? Then you want to serve the Lord. You want to read God's word and ask Him, what is He speaking to you? What is He saying to you? And then how can you share that with other people? As Justin did today. God speaking to his heart; he's sharing that with other people. How can we see God working in our lives as independent people and then share that with others? God speaks through children. God speaks through young people. Our job is to have our eyes on the ark. Each one of us. Not on those people around us, but to be following that ark.

Now what is the ark? Let's just talk about that for a moment because the ark is this box that was created that they carried around. It's 47 inches long, 27 inches wide, 27 inches high. It's beautifully decorated and has some ornate things on top, two angels up on top. It has a lid and when you take the lid off there were three things inside of the ark. There were the Ten Commandments called the Testimony or the ones that Moses had written on. There was a bowl of manna in there. And there was the rod of Aaron that budded. Aaron carried a rod around and God did a miracle at one point and made the rod come to life again and it budded, so they put that into the ark.

But the ark was more than just a keepsake box for these nice things. It was actually the very presence of God. It was the place where God would speak to the people, the place that was considered the place of communication with the God of the universe.

In Exodus 25 we have these words describing the power of the ark. It says, *Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.* So you see that's the communication piece. It's the presence of God. It's representing that presence.

Now there were a lot of rules associated with the ark and how you can manage it or care for it. There were four rings on each corner of the ark and there were two poles that went through. Priests, certain people were to carry the ark with these poles as they moved it from one place to another. God had rules about it, demonstrating the holiness of God. There are particular ways that we function as we're interacting with God or we're coming to the Lord. There are rules about that.

There was one point under David's reign where the ark wasn't in Jerusalem where it needed to be. They were going to bring it up from the city, so they put it on a cart. They were carrying it up to Jerusalem and the ox stumbled. When he stumbled, the ark started to fall off the cart and a man reached out to steady it and he died just like that. You go, "Wow. That's amazing. He died?" He died doing something with good intentions. He had all good intentions of doing something for God, but he wasn't following the rules.

God has rules that He expects us to operate under. He has principles that govern this universe. He expects us to follow the rules, in essence. And when it comes to knowing God and understanding Him, we don't make up God ourselves and say, "Well, this is what God is to me." That's not what we need to do. We need to find out who is God and get to know Him in a personal way.

In the Old Testament we're introduced to the idea of God as Father. But it's not till the New Testament where Jesus really demonstrates God as Father that it's elaborated upon. So in the New Testament we have Jesus saying, "My Father, my Father." Continually he's talking about God as Father. And then when teaching us how to pray, he says, "When you pray say, 'Our Father,'" and so we ourselves are getting to know God in this very personal way; I think very different from what they understood God as in the Old Testament, this dynamic powerful God.

We can't lose that dynamic almighty God as we're thinking about Him as Father. I think some people today become so buddy-buddy with God that they lose the holiness of God. They lose the aspect of who God really is. In essence they make up God for themselves, an almost imaginary God, that's not the God that we worship. God is our friend and God is our Father and there is that close relationship, but there's also this awesome holiness of God, this awesome demonstration of His almighty power that we must be in contact with and understand as we're moving forward. That's what's being talking about here when we're talking about the ark.

Let's go on to verse 4. This is a great verse. In fact let's just read the last verse, verse 3. It says, *you are to move out from your positions and follow it, (verse 4) then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.* I like that. I just think that's one of those verses we can put on the wall.

You'll know which way to go because you've never been this way before. You see, I'm convinced that many of us are on a path that we haven't been on before. When you're going off to college, you've not been here before. You need to be able to follow the presence of God, follow the ark, understand that God will lead you through those places. You come to a medical problem in your life. "I've never been to this place before." You have a child in your life. "I've never been this place before." You have a teenager. "I've never been this place before." There's this sense of knowing, how do I live my life in this particular situation? I think it's hard. It's beautiful in my mind to see the very words that God is saying to them, *Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.*

I love passages in the scripture that share that kind of idea. Like Jesus being the shepherd or Psalm 23 talking about God as our shepherd, leading us beside quiet waters; even when we pass through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil because He is with me.

There is a sense of comfort that comes because "I've never been here before. I don't know what I'm doing!" I think in humility we often need to say that. "I've never raised a James before! And so I don't know what I'm doing!" I think that humility is met with this idea of God's awesomeness, that my first job is to follow the Lord. Because we sometimes don't really know the best way to respond to the things that we're in right now. But God leads us in a place where

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we've never been this way before, (verse 4) *but keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.*

God uses this idea of proximity in the Bible to demonstrate lessons. In this case, holiness. Do you see how far it is? One thousand yards between you and the ark. I think that's over half a mile. That is a long way. He's saying the ark is a long way out there with those guys standing up, holding it, and you're supposed to keep 1,000 yards away from that ark; demonstrating God's holiness through the distance.

God uses this idea, this idea of proximity in His word to illustrate His power and His holiness and how we need to be careful. I think about the story of Moses when he was receiving the Ten Commandments. God told him to go up on the mountain, but put a boundary down there at the bottom of the mountain and told the people do not cross the boundary. Why? To demonstrate or illustrate the holiness of God.

When you think of the tabernacle, the tabernacle had the ark of the covenant in it in the most holy place called the Holy of Holies. Now there were kind of concentric circles as you got closer to the Holy of Holies where fewer and fewer people could go, illustrating the awesome holiness of God. Not just anybody walks into the Holy of Holies. In fact only one man and only once a year could he go into that ark of the covenant inside the Holy of Holies and offer sacrifices. Just illustrating, again, the holiness of God. And so he says, "*Keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.*" God is holy.

Now verse 5. Very interesting progression of the words as we go through the passage. Verse 5 says, *Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."* Now God is going to do amazing things, but He tells them to do something first. I'm continually amazed throughout the passage of the part that God does and the part that man does here in the responsibility. God is going to do amazing things.

I believe God is going to do amazing things in your life. He's going to do amazing things in my life. Things that might seem impossible, but God is in the business of doing amazing things.

Notice what he says. Our responsibility is where he tells the people *consecrate yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you*. That word *consecrate yourselves* is the word *kadosh*. *Kadosh* is the Hebrew word for 'be holy.' He's saying to us, "Be holy." The New Testament word *hagios* is the word 'saints.' I know you might not think you're a saint sometimes, but the idea of saints is not the idea of someone who's perfect. The idea of a saint is someone who's allowed the righteousness of Christ to transform who they are. And so now he's telling these people be holy, consecrate yourselves.

What is that holiness? What does it mean to be holy? What does it mean to do what God wants us to do? I think that's just part of what it means to follow the Lord; to ask ourselves, what do I need to do to follow God? What does He wants me to change inside of my heart? How does He want me to prepare myself to be the kind of person that He wants me to be? That's what God delights in doing.

I was talking a young man, eighteen years old, recently. He doesn't go to our church, but he was telling me that he wanted to work on anxiety and depression in his life. So I said, "Great. Let me do a little report card. Let me ask you some questions. How are you doing at school? Do you have a girlfriend? How are you doing with your sleep? How are you doing with your exercise, your eating?" I'm asking him all the questions that apply, of course, to anxiety and depression. "How are you doing in your walk with the Lord?" I said, "Are you addicted to any drugs or alcohol? Are you taking any drugs or alcohol?" He said, "No. I'm not addicted to anything." I said, "Great." And we go on through the report card.

In the course of things he's saying, "One of the things is I wish I could get over my procrastination. I find myself always delaying things. I know I could do better in school, but I've procrastinated a lot or I put things off all the time. I wish I could get over that." And I said, "What do you do when you should be doing those things?" He says, "Well, I play video games a lot." I said, "There's nothing wrong with video games. Why don't you just set a time?" He said, "I do. I set a time for my video games. I'll play for an hour and then I'll get up and do something. But then I find myself continuing to play for two hours. I continue to do it longer."

As he talked about the video games for him, he's talking about how he escapes in these video games and so on. I said, "You told me you weren't addicted to anything." He says, "I'm not." I said, "Well it sounds to me a lot like you're addicted to video games. The same things that happen when someone's addicted to drugs are happening to you with video games, it looks like, in this situation."

I'm not opposed to video games, believe me. But in this case I think it was robbing him from the ability to go forward. It was hindering him from moving forward.

We talked about idolatry. Do you know what idolatry is? Idolatry is anything that gets in the way of what God wants you to do in your life. In this case it sounds like this guy's problem was video games. It was hindering his ability to move forward in his life. "Idols make you idle," I said to him. Idols, I-D-O-L, make you idle, I-D-L-E. They hinder your ability to move forward. That's why we have to be careful.

For him, consecration meant addressing a particular area of his life, something like video games. Other people it might be substances that they're having a problem with. Others are addicted to emotions. Some people are addicted to people or relationships. Anything can be an idol and get in the way. So God is saying, "Look. I'm going to do amazing things among you, but first you must consecrate yourself. You must clean yourself up." And the reason for that is because God delights in using clean vessels. He likes to use vessels that are ready to be used by Him.

Look at this verse in 2 Timothy 2:20-21. *In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.* I like that.

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God uses clean vessels and He's looking for ways to take us and move us forward. But I think we're kind of dirty people. I think there's a tendency for us to have a hard time getting the dirt off of us. So Joshua is saying consecrate yourself.

In our home, all of our children are gone now; it's just Carrie and me living in our home. But as our children were growing up everybody learned how to wash dishes in our home. They all had their chances and turns. When they got to be teenagers then everybody worked in the kitchen until the job was done after the meal. I often had my hands in the sink washing while everybody else was wiping off the table, cleaning the floor, putting the food away, or doing the other things that needed to be done.

I was washing the dishes before they went into the dishwasher. Occasionally we come to a pot or a casserole dish that was really sticky. My wife's a great cook. She uses our cookware well and so a lot of times there are sticky dishes. Here I'm trying to scrub them off and I'm having a hard time getting them clean. There's sometimes we say, "Just let them soak." Put hot water in there and let it soak for a little bit, then after a few hours it's much easier to clean the casserole dish or the pot that we're trying to work on.

I think God does the same thing with us sometimes. Sometimes He says, "Scott, I'm just going to have you soak in this hot water for a little bit to get you cleaned up." I think God allows us to experience some challenges in our lives sometimes. "I'm just going to have you soak here for a little bit in the steamy water. I know you don't like steamy water, but I think I'm going to have you soak in this for a little bit so that you can get consecrated." Now if we allow the problems, the struggles that we're facing in life to help us to be consecrated, God can do some great things inside of us.

That's what I think he's telling the people. Go consecrate yourselves. Get yourselves ready. Why? Because God's going to do some amazing things.

Isn't it fun when God does some amazing things? When God does amazing things it draws us to worship. That's what worship is. "Whoa, God, you're so big." "Wow, God, you're amazing." "Wow, God, you do great things." God is going to do amazing things that come after the consecration.

Let's go to verse 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.* Now there are several conversations in this passage. Joshua's talking to the people, Joshua's talking to the priest; now God is going to talk to Joshua here in verse 7.

And the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel." An important day, Joshua. I know Moses is off the scene now and I know you've been questioning your own leadership, but I want you to know today's the day I'm going to work through you and raise you up so that other people will appreciate your leadership and they will follow you as you're going in. So God is saying that to Joshua here, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses."

Verse 8. “*Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’*” Isn’t that interesting? He doesn’t say, “When the waters open up, you guys go and stand in there so everyone knows where to go.” He doesn’t say that. He says, “When you get to the edge of the river, go get in it. Go get in the water.”

I really like that because I think sometimes we say, “God, if you part the water, I’ll walk through.” And God sometimes says, “Get in the water and then I’ll part it.” He says, “Take the risk. Get dirty. Get wet. Obey what I told you to do even though it looks impossible, it looks difficult. Do what I told you to do. Go get in the water. And when you get in the water, then I’ll do the miracle.”

I really like the way this progresses here because it’s very illustrious for me personally as I think about what God wants to do in my heart. Sometimes I need to obey first and then see the miracle instead of saying, “God provide the miracle and then I’ll obey.”

Joshua said to the Israelites (in verse 9), “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites.” The Canaanites lived by the coast, the Mediterranean coast. The Hittites and the Hivites lived in walled cities throughout Israel. The Perizzites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Jebusites were the ones who lived in Jerusalem. *See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.*

Now the words *the Lord of all the earth* are just one description of God. In fact look at how Joshua describes God in this passage. Back in verse 9 he says, *the Lord your God*. In verse 10, *the living God*. Verse 11 he says, *the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you*. He’s going to use those words *Lord of all the earth* twice here.

Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. Now that verse, verse 12, we’re going to talk about next week because the whole story in chapter 4 is about these twelve men who went in and created a monument. We’re going to talk about setting up virtual monuments in our lives to remind us of the victories and the answers to prayer that God has done not only for us, but for our children. That happens in Joshua chapter 4. So we’ll skip over verse 12 for now. We’ll come back to it next week and spend the whole Sunday looking at chapter 4 and this one verse.

Verse 13: *And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.* If you imagine the picture here, you’ve got Joshua being exalted now as the leader. You’ve got him telling the priest to go down one thousand yards ahead and stand in the river. Go get in the water. The waters are going to part and then you guys are all going to pass through this whole area.

Now the Jordan River - we’re going to read in verse 15 in a moment - was at flood stage. That means that it’s running pretty fast, as fast as it’s going to be running. It’s probably overshoot its banks to a certain extent. So we’re talking about not just a little stream running through, but God chooses to do a miracle at the most inopportune time if you’re going to cross a river. God delights in doing those kinds of things in our lives.

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Let's read the story now starting in verse 14. *So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 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, 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. 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.*

That's an amazing story. It's amazing because this big river, this very important river that drops such an elevation down here, with lots of water at flood stage is stopped up. A great distance away, I think, creating this huge area where these one million people can cross over, keeping a thousand yards distance from the ark. This must have been quite an event as all of these people passed over; crossing the barrier or the boundary that's preventing them from experiencing the promises that God has for them. God does a miracle to open the door.

I can imagine some of those kids going, "Dad, you've got to be kidding me. I can't swim. How are we going to cross over there?" And some people looking at the boundary saying, "This is too big. Look at how fast it's rushing down here. I don't think we can do this." But God delights in doing miracles. He helps us to cross those boundaries. He opens the rivers for us and He allows us to experience the promises that He has for us.

God was working in Joshua's life. God was working in the lives of the priests and the Levites. God was working in the lives of the people crossing over and their children. But that's not the only people that God was working in. Zip ahead to chapter 5.

I want you to see that God is working in the people who are watching this miracle take place. In Joshua 5:1 it says this: *Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.*

It's interesting to me that God was also working in other people who were watching the miracle take place. When God works in your life as you're spiritually transparent, other people can see what God is doing inside of your heart. I think Facebook is a great tool for spiritual transparency, so other people can see what God is doing inside your own heart. We can see it anyway, but it would be nice to see the godly side of things that could be going on in your heart as you talk about what God is doing. Maybe God needs to consecrate your Facebook. I don't know. But there's this idea when other people are seeing what's going on in our lives, it's a testimony to them.

I was visiting the discipleship group yesterday morning that Erik leads at Mastoris Diner every Saturday morning. There were nine of us talking. Erik was leading us through a Bible study and we were sharing about our spiritual lives. As we were sitting there, there was a woman across the way that kept watching us the whole time. She was just staring at us while we were working. So

when she left, as she went by us, I said, “Hey, here’s my business card if you want to see what kinds of things we’re talking about.” Who knows what God will do with that.

But I know that people are watching you, they’re watching me, they’re watching our lives. As we demonstrate Jesus Christ, people are saying, “I want what you have. There’s something that you have that I need.” Because what we’re doing here is not a club, it’s not just something we’re doing in our church because we all don’t have something to do on Sunday mornings. We come together because God is doing something individually in our lives. So we get together, we share that, we enjoy that, we celebrate that, we’re encouraged in that, and then we go away and continue to allow God to work in our lives no matter where we are. As young people living in homes where parents have some problems. Or parents living in homes with children who have some problems. As we’re working together, God does some great things.

So we’re allowing God to do that difficult work inside of our hearts. I think sometimes we see things in our lives, like the river, and we say, “That river is a boundary. I’m stuck. I have to be on this east side of the Jordan for the rest of my life.” And God says, “I’ve got plans for you. I’ve got hope and a future that I want to give to you.” And that’s going to mean we’re going to cross the boundary. But it’s going to require some work on our part, not just on God’s part. God’s going to part the rivers, but we have to do our part in order to be ready to do that.

There’s a beautiful song, an old song, but it’s a song I really like that takes off on this particular passage of scripture. It says:

*Got any rivers you think are uncrossable;
Got any mountains you can’t tunnel through?
God specializes in things thought impossible.
He does the things others cannot do.*

I don’t know what God has in your life and what He’s doing and what promises He wants to give to you and allow you to experience in your life. But I want you to know that we serve a God who does miracles. God can do a miracle in the life of a child, a young person, an adult, even us older people. God delights in taking us to new places in our lives. We’re at this one place, each one of us in our lives, and God wants to take us to the next place. It’s going to require some work on our part, but God has some promises waiting for us.

It starts as we consecrate ourselves, as we come before God and we say, “God, I need your help.” And maybe the miracle for you is the consecration. Maybe saying, “I am such a mess. Nothing can happen in my life that’s productive.” Maybe the miracle is God wants to do some things inside your heart just to change you, not to change your environment. To change you. To turn you into the person that God wants you to be. That’s part of what we’re talking about when we say “living the Christian life.” It’s a personal experience we all have before the Lord and God delights in doing great things in the midst of that.