

### **“Guiding Grace” (Joshua 3)(2.21.21)**

Joshua 3 (NIV84) *Crossing the Jordan*

**3** Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. <sup>2</sup> After three days the officers went throughout the camp, <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> **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.”

<sup>5</sup> Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.”

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> And the Lord said to Joshua, “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. <sup>8</sup> 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.’ ”

<sup>9</sup> Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. <sup>10</sup> This is how **you will know that the living God is among you** and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. <sup>11</sup> See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. <sup>12</sup> Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. <sup>13</sup> 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.”

<sup>14</sup> So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

#### **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Guiding Grace”**

INTRODUCTION:

A couple of weeks ago, my son invited me to go with him to the Wednesday night service at Calvary Chapel in Hammonton. They open with a few praise songs and there is a smattering of prayers. The bulk of the evening is spent in the exposition of scripture. The pastor led us through all of Matthew 26, the happenings of that fateful Thursday night when Jesus was arrested after His betrayal by Judas.

There was a fair amount of time addressing the failings of Peter. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter fell asleep when he should have been praying. Peter took a sword and cut off a man’s ear. After boasting about his faithfulness, Peter denied Jesus three times that night.

An idea came to my mind. I wondered if Peter’s failings were necessary for him to become who God purposed him to be. Things happen and we are dismayed and disappointed in ourselves. The key issue is if we respond to the Lord who will use our failings and trials. Are we teachable? Are we willing to trust our Lord?

*Helen Keller* - I thank God for my handicaps, for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.

*Anne Lamott - I do not at all understand the mystery of grace-only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us!*

BODY:

Two weeks ago, we learned about God's restraining grace. I introduced you to Doyl C. Tully and his wife Vonette. After getting caught up in the party life and the drug culture, they were arrested. Their lives fell apart and everything they valued was lost. All they had left was the loving support of their parents.

While Vonette was at a prayer meeting, Doyl was at home drinking highballs. He was attacked by satanic demons and in his depression he almost succumbed to their evil call for suicide. The Lord Jesus made his love and presence known to Doyl and he became a new creation that fateful night. Let us journey with them.

"With this new-found Savior came a new hope. But I found myself not knowing what to do, so we began attending the local church, hoping to find direction and answers. I will never forget our first visit to this church. I cannot remember the service itself, but I really remember the pastor's invitation.

Vonette and I were sitting on a pew near the back of an approximately 400-seat worship center. The pastor was calling people to be real with the Lord. He asked the congregation to not be ashamed of Him, but to come to the front and proclaim Jesus as Lord of their lives.

They started singing a song, "Just as I Am, without One Plea." As they were singing, my heart began to pound. I mean, it was beating so hard I thought it would come out of my chest. As I stood there, I grasped the pew in front of me and held tightly – so tightly, my knuckles turned white.

In one ear, I heard a voice saying, "Go and proclaim that you belong to Me, tell the people you are Mine." In the other ear, immediately following this, I heard another message, "Don't go down there. They will laugh at you and make fun of you." Then back in the other ear, "Go and tell them you mean business with Me." Then again, in the other ear, "They will not believe you. They will think you are doing this because you are in trouble and just want to look good for the court system." Once again, in the other ear, "Go My child, I want you to go." Without a question, a war was being waged for my soul, back and forth, back and forth. My heart desired to know God, but my flesh was unsure what to do.

I ached deep inside, wanting to obey God, but so ashamed of my past. Wanting to go God's way, but feeling like others would laugh. Even my bones seemed to cry out in distress. It felt like an eternity. They sang one verse...then the chorus...then the next verse...then the chorus...

At this point, I thought the pastor was going to end it. He stepped up to the microphone and surprised me completely. He did not end it, but he again asked us not to delay, not to say no to the Savior, but to come and let Him have His way with our lives. These words were like streams of fire burning deep into my soul, igniting a flame. A flame that burned more and more brightly, until I thought, I don't care what others think. I don't care about my past. I don't care if I don't have all the answers. I just want to know and follow Him.

Realizing that my heart was fixed on pleasing God, I turned to walk toward the aisle. As I took my first step, I felt Vonette's hand slipping into my arm. I turned to see what she wanted. Our eyes met. Her eyes said it all. She too was ready to tell everyone that we believed in Jesus Christ, and we were ready to follow Him wherever He would lead our lives.

Our first few steps toward the aisle were so difficult. I felt as though I was carrying a thousand-pound weight on my back. I was hardly able to take a step. My legs trembled, and I wondered if I might fall, but we finally reached the aisle.

I took in a breath. It looked like it was a mile long. There seemed to be thousands of people laughing and pointing at us in that moment. I stood there for what seemed like an hour, fighting off the perceived laughter. As we made the first, second, and third steps, the weight became lighter and lighter.

My eyes locked with the pastor's, and then an amazing thing happened. The laughter was replaced by thousands of voices praising and glorifying God. By the time we reached the front of the church, the weight was gone. It had turned into the great and wonderful joy of the Lord."

The doubtful voices were correct. There were people that were suspicious of this public profession of faith. But the others in the church rallied around Doyl and Vonette. They would be supported in many different ways. The Lord was changing Doyl and Vonette's hearts: their hearts for Him and their hearts for each other. Their love was reignited.

With the last of their savings, they retained the best lawyer they could afford. "Our attorney advised us to postpone our case as long as we could. Our hope was that as time elapsed, people might not care as much about what we had done. Our attorney reassured us that first-time offenders would not receive much, and that a woman would for sure get probation."

During this time, God brought people alongside Doyl and Vonette. They were disciplined by faithful couples. They studied their Bible. The Holy Spirit went to work through sanctifying grace. They realized that they could no longer walk with one foot in the world and one foot in the faith.

As the court date approached, their attorney started negotiating a plea with the prosecutor. They were told that if they pleaded guilty to possession of methaqualuade [sic], they would get a maximum of 2.5 years instead of a possible 15 years. While Doyl was deeply fearful about Vonette going to prison, their attorney again reassured them that everything would be fine. Vonette would likely just end up on probation and he would likely only have to do six months. Reluctantly, they agreed to take the "deal."

"During our sixty days of the pre-sentencing background investigation, those who loved and cared for us pleaded for our freedom. Many wrote letters to the judge expressing how we'd changed and did not need to go to prison. People from all over town signed a petition stating that they believed we did not need prison, that we were reformed. Some even made an appointment with the judge and begged him to give us probation."

Doyl's mother went to see the judge. "She told him about the change Christ had made in our lives and that we truly were different. The judge fired back in a sarcastic sneer, "If they really have Jesus, then they will make it. Prison will be a snap."

At the sentencing hearing, the judge asked Doyl if he wanted to say something. "I did. I explained that we had received Christ as our Savior and Lord and that we were no longer the same as before. I shared that I was sorry for my sin and for breaking the law. I told him I hoped someday to be able to help others not go down the same path.

I saw the judge take a pen and scratch out something on a piece of paper, then write something new in its place. I had no idea what he was doing, but later I found out that he was intending to give the maximum sentence possible, until I spoke. He then changed his mind and reduced it.

He looked over his glasses at me and said, "Doyl Tully, for the crimes you have committed, I sentence you to fifteen months hard labor with the Department of Corrections."

I was stunned. Where was the grace for the first time offenders...or the six months...or the probation? My head swirled.

The judge then called Vonette up to the same spot. He then looked down those same glasses and said, "Vonette Tully, for the crimes you have committed, I sentence you to fifteen months hard labor with the Department of Corrections."

They were in a whirlwind of confusion. One night soon after the sentencing, Vonette was unable to sleep. She got out her Bible to read for comfort. Doyl recalls, "The Lord led her to a verse that changed our lives forever. I do not think she fully understood the power of this verse. She just began to embrace that God was in control. It was Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes." This was a powerful verse that we would claim many times in the difficult days to come."

Their attorney filed an appeal with the State Court of Appeals and it would take nearly a year for a ruling. In the three years from their arrest to the arrival of the Court's response letter, God had moved mightily in their lives. Doyl was three years into a computer science degree. Vonette was given a job by

another church member. Financial gifts and food were dropped off for them. They grew in their faith and learning God's word.

When the bad news arrived, their appeal being denied, Doyle and Vonette were heartbroken. Immediately, their church family surrounded them with love and support. Doyle and Vonette were sent to the same local jail while they waited for space to be available at the state prison. Being separated was the hardest part, though eventually a Christian guard would arrange for them to see each other. There were frequent visits by their church family and they got to see each other during those group visits. This was a completely new environment and they dreaded the day they would hear, "Get your stuff together. Today, you are going down the road." This meant the state prison. Life in this jail was scary enough and Doyle was confronted by evil in a palpable way and yet he was miraculously protected. He was leading Bible studies in the jail and sharing the good news of Jesus however he could. Their constant prayer, crying out to God, was to do a miracle and keep them from the State Prison.

After two months in the jail, their pastor visited with news of hope. A state representative was introducing a piece of legislation that might get them out of jail and avoid going to the State Prison. "As the days accumulated, we found out more about this new program, but the news was disturbing instead of encouraging. We found out that this was a new work-release program for the State of Louisiana. It would be offered to only two first-time offenders of non-violent crimes. We qualified. That was the good news.

However, we faced two very difficult problems – problems that only God could cut through and make happen for us. First, the state legislature was still working on approving the program. In fact, the funding for this program was not even appropriated, and no one could tell any of us when this might happen. Second, on top of the first bad news, we found out the number of eligible prisoners for the program was about 2,500 in the current prison system. 2,500 prisoners eligible! I could not believe it. How in the world would Vonette and I be selected out of that many people?

Our hope quickly turned to despair, and the days turned into weeks. We began to question if this would ever happen for us. Again, they claimed the promises of Romans 8:28. "Well, we loved God, and we believed we were called unto His purpose. As we held onto His promise, a surge of faith again began to build within our hearts."

"Our pastor and my mom never gave up. They petitioned the Lord (and anyone who would listen to them) about us. They worked so hard on our behalf. On October 6, 1983, we got word that we had been selected for this new program!

It seemed God had parted the sea of the Department of Corrections, and we walked through on dry land. God had protected us, had saved us from prison, and delivered us into a program before the funding had even been set up. What a great God! We never stepped foot into a prison, but by all of man's wisdom, we should have. "But God, being rich in mercy and grace..." He delivered His children, and we began a new journey."

When Doyle and Vonette were released to the half-way house, the other prisoners cheered as the guards shook their head in disbelief. Their church friends showed up to see them off. As they exited the jail into the sunshine for the first time in three months, there was a high school homecoming parade going by in front of the jail.

"So many times before I went to jail, I would pray that God would not allow this to happen. "I do not need to go to prison," I proclaimed. Now I know that without this experience, I would have never matured to the walk I have in Christ. Therefore, praise be to our Lord and God for all the jail time I served, for it was created by His divine plan, guided by His divine hand, and given for His divine purpose in me. Hallelujah!"

The half-way house was the Fellowship Mission in Shreveport, LA. The director of the mission had been lobbying for this new program for years. Doyle and Vonette shared their testimony with local churches and with legislators. Not only did their witness help provide funding for the mission, they formed several

key lasting relationships. They had crossed over the Jordan but the Lord still had battles ahead for them to take possession of The Promised Land.

CONCLUSION:

God had 40 years to plan when the Hebrew nation would enter The Promised Land. (You might argue that God had all of eternity before the foundation of the world to consider it.) Why might The Almighty have chosen the flood stage of the Jordan to cross over? My brothers and sisters, it was no accident. Maybe you are in a fiery furnace. Maybe you find yourself in some form of a prison. Maybe your feeble faith finds you denying the Lord Jesus. We too, like Peter can be restored. Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" Watch what our great God can do. **Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.**

He leadeth me, he leadeth me,  
by his own hand he leadeth me;  
his faithful follower I would be,  
for by his hand he leadeth me.

John 1:16 (ESV) For from Jesus' fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.  
Amen and amen. Let us pray.