

SEPTEMBER 11, 1994

ACTING ON FAITH

Everything we do requires faith. That may seem to be a bit of an overstatement, however, when you consider all the things we "take for granted" in life as an expression of faith, then it doesn't seem to be unreasonable. When you brush your teeth you are exercising faith in the company that made and packaged the toothpaste, those that delivered it and those that sold it. If you read the label and saw that the toothpaste met all the requirements of a certain FDA regulation, then you might also be exercising faith in the FDA. Do companies make mistakes? Can someone contaminate a product even when it is on the shelf of the store? Can the FDA be wrong? Of course, all that is possible, but our experience says that we can put trust in what they do. So acting on faith is not a strange thing to any of us.

The things that cause us difficulty in exercising faith are related to situations in which we have little or no experience. We also have trouble exercising faith in areas that require capability beyond what we can do or comprehend being done. In the case of the toothpaste, we can understand how the various ingredients can be verified to be correct, combined in the right proportions, mixed in sterile equipment, packaged in a safe manner and a safe container (although the old metal tubes used lead solder), and delivered to you. On the other hand, we have difficulty understanding how the Israelites could walk through the Red Sea on dry ground. We have difficulty in understanding how water came out of a flint-like rock or how manna was provided as food for more than two million people. If we have trouble understanding, then we can appreciate the difficulty those who experienced these events had.

The Israelites were faced with tasks so big that it was humanly impossible to accomplish and they experienced the supernatural power of God. Did the people have great faith? No, there is little evidence they did. However, their leader had faith and they benefitted from his faithfulness. It was Moses who raised his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea and then the waters divided. But Moses acted because he listened to God. God did not ask him to do something impossible. Moses could tell the people to "move on" and he could raise his staff and stretch out his hand. It was God Who did the impossible. Because Moses obeyed in what God told him to do, all the people experienced God at work on their behalf.

As the Israelites were ending their 40-year preparation to enter the promised land, they were going to experience further challenges to believe and trust God. Moses had died and now Joshua was their leader. Would the people follow Joshua as they had followed Moses?

JOSHUA 3:7-8 Jesus said, "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them and they follow Me." One essential requisite for a person to lead the people of God is to listen to the voice of God. God communicated with Joshua, Joshua followed what God told him, and God then validated Joshua's ministry. The people of Israel were probably uneasy when Moses had died and Joshua was somewhat "unproven." If we will be obedient to God, then He will confirm the ministry to which He has called us. Even the apostle Paul reminded the church at Thessalonica that the word he brought to them came not in mere words, but in power confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

How would God confirm His own power and the calling of Joshua? God would do what only He could do and He would reveal His plan and purpose to Joshua. The things God asked Joshua to do were things that Joshua could do. God would do the impossible. Joshua was to command the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant to step out into the Jordan river. (Apparently, God also told Joshua what would happen after that since he then passed this information on to the Israelites.)

JOSHUA 3:9-13 Another essential responsibility of a leader of God's people is to tell the people what God has said. Joshua called the people together and told them the words of the Lord. Because of what God was going to do, the people would experience the presence and power of God. They would come to know God by what He did.

The people saw the Ark of the Covenant that symbolized the presence of God and it was to go before them. The people would know that God really was living among them and would build a strong association between the Ark and the power of God.

In a mighty display of power, God would stop the flow of the Jordan river at the point in time that the feet of the priests got into the water. People have speculated that a landslide occurred

upstream at a place where the river goes through a narrow gorge. I have no problem with how God implemented the miracle. The point is that God did it and did it at the proper time.

The event did not just happen and then Joshua concocted a tale about it. Joshua told the people what would happen before the fact. This is the way God works. Jesus did the same thing with His disciples. He told them what was going to happen to Him so that when it came to pass they could believe. Even today, God is telling His people what is going to happen so that when it does come to pass, they can believe.

JOSHUA 3:14-17 Notice that the people had to exercise some faith in breaking camp and getting ready to move out. If they had not believed God, then they would have just stayed where they were. Staying where they were might have been easier than being obedient. They had plenty of cause for concern. The Jordan was in flood stage and people did not typically try to cross it during flood stage. They did not look at the circumstances around them, but were obedient to what God told them to do.

Notice that they did not run ahead of God. The Ark of the Covenant went before the people. A key to being successful in interacting with God -- which is what the Christian life is all about -- is to follow Him. So many times we try to lead and then expect God to follow us. We see as a regular routine, individuals and churches making plans and initiating programs to do "good things" and then ask God to bless what they are doing. The trick is to find out what God is doing and then join Him in the work He is doing.

As soon as the priests' feet were dipped in the water's edge, the flow of the Jordan was interrupted. We are told that the water piled up in a heap many miles away. A landslide may have dammed up the river. Apparently that has happened in recent history (1267, 1906, and 1927) creating a temporary blockage of the water. This was no less a miracle in its timing than if some unexplained phenomenon had caused the water flow to stop.

The previous generation of Israelites had failed to enter the promised land and if this next generation had failed to act on faith, then they would not have gone in either. There are many benefits to believing God and doing what He tells us to.

Where are we today? We put our trust in people that we have never met and know nothing about although we do know that many people are not trustworthy. Yet we have much difficulty in trusting God Whom we claim to know and Who can never fail. Perhaps if we would trust Him more by obeying Him fully, then we would come to know Him better.