

God's Revelation of Himself to Us.

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[0 : 0 0] let's pray as we come back to God's word Heavenly Father we thank you for the promise and the reality that we are called to look back on this season and the year the reality of Emmanuel, God with us we thank you for the amazing story that our minds could not fabricate the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ we thank you for all that we've sung of of the story of God the Son coming into the squalor of this world, into the poverty of the existence that he knew we thank you for such love that was willing to stoop to such a depth not only to the squalor of a stable but to the cruelty and the horror of Calvary and yet we thank you that he came and he did this for us we thank you that God was with us and lived and died and rose for us so that we who are sinners could be reconciled and find that we are now with God in and through the grace and the completed work of Christ so help us Lord we pray never to wander far from the cross but to be found always looking to our crucified and risen Saviour the one in whom all our hope is found and the one in whom we have the assurance and the joy of your salvation on us so we pray that you would touch our hearts tonight Lord and that you would clear our minds of all that would distract us that you would be near to us that we would know the presence of Emmanuel God with us and we pray that all of my words and all of our thoughts and meditations and responses would be glorifying to you and we ask all this in Jesus name

Amen Perhaps you hadn't noticed that Christmas is coming Boys and girls you can speak to me for a little minute have you given any thought to what you'd like for Christmas you can maybe put your hand up and tell me if you've got any thoughts the more people that hear this the more likely you will be to receive such things any thoughts on what you'd like for Christmas Jono not sure Lois pardon art things yeah Daniel do you want any thoughts about what you'd like for Christmas no not yet not yet I've been asking that question of a few girls and boys just when I've been visiting around the place and some boys and girls would tell me they'd like some

Lego for Christmas there was other little girls who told me they'd like LOL dolls lol dolls I'm not sure how you say it but wee dolls somebody else tell me they'd like a football strip maybe some others would want a game for their Playstation maybe a tractor or a JCB or a toy one or something like that there's I can remember some years when I was a wee boy knowing exactly what I wanted for Christmas and sometimes I can remember getting it I'm very happy for a wee while anyway and then there's other years I can remember just asking for a surprise you ever ask for a surprise and sometimes I got a surprise sometimes it was a good one but that's our first point for tonight surprise four points the first point is surprise and as we turn to this book of Joshua again we see in this book the experience and the journeys of the nation of Israel but first and foremost in this book the book of Joshua and indeed the whole

Bible every chapter every verse this is God's revelation of himself to us yes when we open the Bible we receive teaching about our lives we receive a reflection sometimes of our own hearts because the Bible is like a mirror but first and foremost we see in God's word a revelation of who he is and in the book of Joshua we see that this God whom Joshua knew who is the same God that we know the same God who has promised that he'll be here with us tonight he's a God of surprises he doesn't do things the way we'd expect and it's just a flavour of that in in this passage that we read this evening Joshua 16 and

Joshua 17 in Joshua chapter 16 and 17 we read about the allotment of land for Ephraim and Manasseh and you might say well what are we doing here at Christmas time and what are we doing here ploughing through more details and more names and more maps and more boundaries what is it that's notable about the details of this chapter tonight and in terms of the allotment of land what's notable about this it's a small point but it's a significant point it's the order it's the order of how God does things in that day and that age it was normal for the first born to have his portion given to him first and then the second born to have his portion of land allotted to him second so it would be normal in the running order of this passage for us to read about

[7 : 24] Manasseh's portion being allotted and then Ephraim the second born his portion to be allotted but that's not what happens the order actually is reversed and it's not because Joshua had taken his eye off the ball it's not because Joshua had got confused and forgetful and just got slightly muddled in the way that he recorded this Joshua knows and we can see that from verse 4 of chapter 16 Joshua knows the order of their birth and yet contrary to the way things were done in terms of allocation of land what we read here in the subsequent verses is that Ephraim's portion is allotted before Manasseh's portion the second comes first the first comes second one of the commentators says it's just a reminder another hint of God's strange ways how often the divine way reverses the conventions of men overthrows the human canon of what ought to be that's why the God of the

Bible is so stimulating and refreshing Isaiah 55 and verse 9 says as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts God is a God of surprises and we see that just a flavor of it in Joshua 16 and Joshua 17 but if we think back through the story so far in the book of Joshua we see it much more clearly remember in Joshua chapter 3 children of Israel they're on the threshold of the promised land they've come all this way they're standing at the Jordan River it's fast flowing it's dangerous it's about a mile in width and they have no way to cross it so the children of Israel are looking thinking how are we going to actually persevere into this land that

God has promised we can imagine them having a planning meeting what would you have said what would you have done we might have been thinking well is it possible to put together some kind of a bridge structure would God help us to do that should God be calling us perhaps to look for some kind of a vessel to navigate our way across is that how he's going to do it is there any possible way that we can go upstream and try and have some kind of a dam but surely that's not possible with such a huge immense river but these are the kind of suggestions that our engineering minds might go to that would be our plans what's God's plan in Joshua chapter 3 remember what he says verse 11 of Joshua 3 you don't need to go there see the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the

Jordan ahead of you now then this is the Lord speaking to Joshua choose 12 men from the tribes of Israel one from each tribe 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 in a heap and that's how it happened and to say that would have been a surprise to the children of Israel is an immense understatement and yet that's how God did it he's a God of surprises and then if we go from the Old Testament into the New Testament and we think about our own need for salvation our own safe passage from time into eternity into heaven how would

God engineer that well who would ever have thought that his plan would be that God the son Jesus would come himself into the world that he created as a baby and who would ever have thought that the God who knew no sin would become sin so that you and I could become righteous and who would ever have thought that the God who said I am the life would lay his life down and go to a cross to die in our place and who would ever have thought that the God who died would rise from the dead on the third day to justify us and to secure our salvation our

[13 : 09] God is a God who is full of glorious transcendent above our minds above our ways above our thoughts unimaginable surprises some people think that if they become Christians life will become boring and that's why they hesitate to follow Christ how could it possibly be boring how could life possibly be predictable and dull when we are called to follow this God you know if our Christian lives are boring and predictable and hum drum then maybe we're not following Jesus closely enough and maybe he's calling us to catch up first point there surprise surprises

God is a God of surprises the second point is supplication for the boys and girls you probably don't often hear the word supplication what does it mean well it means simply asking for something and at the beginning of chapter 17 we find Zelophodid's daughters asking for something look at verse 3 now Zelophodid son of Hefer the son of Gilead the son of Machia the son of Manasseh had no sons but only daughters whose names were Mala Noah Hogla Micah and Tirzah they went to Eliezer the priest Joshua son of Nun and the leaders and said the Lord commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers so Joshua gave them an inheritance along with the brothers of their father and so on it goes and some details of the inheritance are given there but what we hear from the daughters of

Zelophodid is that they're asking for something they're asking for God to give them something they're asking for some land they're asking for an inheritance supplication sometimes we're not sure what we should ask for I remember as a little boy or a medium sized boy actually quite a chubby little boy growing up in a match and at communion time the ministers would come to the match and dinners would be served on Thursday and Friday and Saturday and Sunday and Monday and there'd be lots of people at the table and I'd be there with my two sisters my mum and dad would be dishing out the roast beef and all the stuff and I would enjoy that quite a thing but then it would come to pudding time and I would really really enjoy the pudding and the trifle or the chocolate gato or whatever it would be served up and everybody would get their bit and then my mum would say would any really like seconds she'd kind of look across the table and most people would say oh no I couldn't possibly have seconds very full no I couldn't

I couldn't have seconds I always wanted seconds but I was never actually sure whether I should ask for it because sometimes I would ask for seconds and I would be kind of glowered at and then the seconds would get put on my plate and other times I would ask for seconds and I would get told to go through and wash the dishes you greedy little character you've already had plenty already the point is sometimes we're we're actually not sure what we should ask for did the daughters of Zalophe did here did they ask for the right thing when they came asking Moses they came asking the high priest for land the question should they have been asking for land and the answer is yes now how do we know that they should have been asking for land well because they were only asking for what God had already promised them and so when they come asking they also come reminding

Joshua and Eliezer and the leaders of the fact that God promised them this land so they're asking for what God had already promised them and you want to read about that you can read about that in Joshua in Numbers 27 and Numbers 36 but they they make this supplication they ask and they ask a right because they're asking for what they know God has promised them and these daughters of Zilofa did they teach us about prayer we always need to learn how to pray and one of the things about prayer is we have to come asking God for things if you want to think about prayer in terms of a wee structure for those who are scribbling away with notes when I think about how to structure a prayer in my own mind

[19 : 08] I remember what somebody told me many years ago acts ACTS A is for adoration we come in prayer we adore God we think about how wonderful he is and we worship him for his goodness and his grace and his love and his patience that's the A for adoration and then there's the C for confession we come to God in prayer we recognize that we're sinners and so we ask God to forgive us for our sin that's AC the T is for thanksgiving we think about all the amazing things God has done for us and continues to do for us and we say thank you God and the final thing S is for supplication which means when we come to God in prayer he expects us to ask for things now how do we know what to ask for the daughters of Zelophehad knew what to ask for because they could think back to one of

God's promises now how do we know what to ask for well we go to God's huge promise book the Bible and if God has spoken in the Bible to us as his people and if he's promised something to us in his word then we can go and ask for it humbly and reverently and yet boldly we can ask God for things Mary and I have a voucher on the pinboard in the kitchen for Digby Chick we're entitled to go there and there's some that's set aside and we can go and have a meal in Digby Chick and it's a promise somebody gave us it and it's a promise that we can go in with this thing and we can have a meal with it but it's been stuck in the pinboard for quite a long time and I've never yet been to

Digby Chick so it's a promise that we're going to have to and I look forward to claiming at some point I just wonder how many of God's promises are stuck in the pinboard of his word and we're so slow to claim them the daughters of Zelophehad teach us to claim God's promises to come to him and to ask him for the things that he has promised that he will give us sometimes we're fearful about things and God has said don't be fearful ask me for help I'll be your refuge I'll be your strength sometimes we're conscious of how weak we are and that's a good thing and God has promised that his strength is made perfect in our weakness and so we're to ask for that strength and we're to ask for his grace which is enough for each day to get us through but we have to ask

Jesus said in Matthew 7 ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened to you for everyone who asks receives he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be opened which of you says Jesus if a son asks for bread will give him a stone or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him Hebrews 4 verse 16 let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need be encouraged to ask

God for the many many things that he has promised he will give us when we ask him we ask him as we pray so we have the surprise of God's ways we have the supplication which we hear and are taught through the daughters of Zelophehad the third thing we see here is a slippage a slipping away from God's path and this is almost incredible for us to come across at this point in the book because again try and put yourself in the situation of the children of Israel imagine you had been one of these people and you'd been in the company or you'd been staring at the Jordan River and you'd seen how fast it was flowing and you saw how impossible it was to cross and then you saw the water standing up in a heap somewhere upstream and you walked across on dry land you saw the miraculous power of

[25 : 02] God and imagine you had come out of battles where you had faced giants who were many more times powerful than you and yet you'd seen them all fall because God was with you how many times did God's people see such miraculous supernatural interventions of God in their experience how good how gracious how amazing God had been to them how faithful he'd been to them even though they had strayed how patient he was with them even when they rebelled you'd think that having seen everything that they'd seen they would be absolutely faithful and absolutely devoted and whole hearted in following him but that's not what we're actually seeing there's various verses here which just signed a warning shot that God's people are slipping once more from his way chapter 17 verses 12 to 13 talks about the

Manassites as they're going in to take the land that God promised that was their land and it says there in verse 12 of chapter 17 yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region however when the Israelites grew stronger they subjected the Canaanites to forced labour but they did not drive them out completely now God said drive them out completely because they're going to take their gods their idols into your spiritual experience but they did not drive them out completely there's compromise in that verse and if we put that verse alongside various other verses that we've just noted in the last couple of weeks we see the beginnings of a slippage chapter 15 verse 63 there's another kind of take on this

Judah it says could not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem and to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah again there was an influence an anti-God influence that they were allowing to remain amongst them chapter 16 and verse 10 they did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Giza to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour see God made clear what he would have them do and he said this is your land and these are the people who have been in absolute rebellion against me and you have to drive them out with all their gods and with all the sin that they are determined to persevere and you have to drive them out and yet in chapter 15 we read that they could not and in chapter 16 we read that they did not and yet

God promised that they could and God commanded that they should William still the late William still said God's commands are his enablings he would never ask us to do anything that he would not give us the power to do read that again God's commands are his enablings he would never ask us to do anything that he would not give us the power to do and that was true in Joshua's day and it's still true today so what was happening here with the Israelites after everything that they'd seen and everything God had taken them through what was happening well their faith was weakening again and unbelief was rising up again

Calvin says they had they proceeded in a manly and hearty manner to make good their right to the land which had fallen to them by lot the victory was in their hands and yet they refused to take God at his word they settled in compromise and they were on a slippery slope and any deviation from God's word and his way is a slippery slope any accommodation of sin in our hearts no matter how small and how much under control we might think we have it it leads to ruin and if you want to see a ruin read the book of Judges because that's where we see what that compromise grew into so the surprise the supplication there is that slipping from God's way and just a word to finish there's there's selfishness there's a selfish discontent that we see in verses 14 to verse 18 again I remember one

[31 : 26] Christmas morning and forgive me for the personal story but I don't tell you these stories to make me look good I'm telling you the story it makes me look bad again remember one Christmas morning after I'd opened all my presents and I'd had lots of presents and I made the mistake of saying something out loud that went through my mind what I said to my dad was I know I want my birthday now I want a tank to go with the jeep that I got for action man and I got an absolute blasting over it here I was on Christmas morning action man tank all the toys everywhere and I said on May 16th I know what I want for my birthday I want more it was absolute selfishness and we hear something of that in these verses verse 14 the people of Joseph said to Joshua why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance verse 16 the hill country is not enough for us they weren't content with what

God gave them and in the verses that are surrounding that and subsequent to that even though Joshua says to them well if you're not happy with what you've got then go on take on the giants get to battle trust God to take you a little bit further and they say no no no we don't want to do that we've heard about the iron chariots they don't have faith they've drifted from God and there's a discontent that just can never satisfy what they want materially and the new testament taking this we find encapsulated in 1st timothy 6 and verse 6 godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it the more we drift from God the more we slip the less we are content the more we mump and moan and shake our fist at God like these people did and just to finish let's take up this challenge and this opportunity at a time of year where there's such a desperate desire to get more and more and more stuff let's remember that we don't actually get any comfort any satisfaction or any contentment from our stuff and if we pursue material possessions to try and satisfy us like the people of Joseph here did forever we're going to be saying the same thing that they were saying if only you'd given me a little bit more it's not enough for me so what is enough who is enough

Christ is enough now none but Christ can satisfy no other name for me there's love and life and lasting joy Lord Jesus found in thee and may we find that love and that life and that lasting joy as I pray that we look in faith to him