

## **Stones of Remembrance**

### **Joshua 4**

We need reminders of significant events in our past. To help us remember, memorials are built.

The Iwo Jima memorial, which was inspired by a photograph of actual events, depicts five marines and a navy hospital corpsman raising the American flag. This memorial helps us remember a historical battle that was key to the United States' victory over Japan in WWII.

The Berlin Holocaust Memorial which lies between East and West Berlin resembles a vast field of nameless tombstones and is designed to help us remember the horror of the Nazi death camps.

A memorial is currently under construction in New York City and is due to be completed and opened to the public on September 11 of next year to help us remember the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Monuments are built not only to help those living at the time these events occurred to remember what happened, but also to remind future generations of what happened.

Just as it is important for us to have memorials to remind us and future generations of the past, it was important for God's people, Israel, to set up a memorial to help them never forget what God had done for them in the crossing of the Jordan River.

### **The cutting off of the Jordan River and Israel's crossing on dry ground (Joshua 3)**

### **The completion of the crossing and the restoring of the flood (Joshua 4:10-18)**

Everything the LORD commanded of Joshua was accomplished. The priests and the ark remained in the riverbed while the people hurried across. The men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 40,000 of them, crossed over the Jordan armed and in front of the Israelites as Moses directed them. As the LORD promised, Joshua was exalted in the sight of all Israel by God's demonstration of His presence and power in the crossing of the Jordan. This event, which made it evident that God was with Joshua as He had been with Moses, caused the people to demonstrate the same respect towards him that they had given to his predecessor. After all the Israelites crossed the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony were commanded to come up out of the river bed. No sooner had they set foot on the other side of the Jordan did the river's waters return to their place and run at flood stage as before.

### **Remembering the event (4:1-9)**

#### **Twelve men are to pile up twelve stones taken from the Jordan**

You will remember that in Joshua 3:12 that Joshua was instructed to select twelve men for a special mission, one from each tribe of Israel.

However, in that verse, we aren't immediately told what the mission of these men will be. It is in Joshua 4 that we are informed of their mission. Each of the twelve is to take a stone from the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priest's feet rested on the dry river bed and put it down at Israel's next campsite.

### **The pile of twelve stones will serve as a sign for Israel**

Signs in Scripture are used to authenticate something. To authenticate that Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground, stones were removed from the center of it and placed at Israel's campsite.

### **The pile of twelve stones will serve as a teaching aid for parents**

Future generations will be prompted by the pile of stones to ask what it means. The inquiry of children will provide parents the opportunity to share what God did for Israel.

"In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off."

### **The pile of stones will serve as a memorial to help Israel never forget what God did for them**

In obedience to the Lord's instruction, the 12 build a memorial. In verse 9, we also see that Joshua spontaneously leaves a personal reminder at the place where the priests stood with the ark. There, he stacks 12 stones. This second memorial that Joshua built would only be visible when the river was low. However, when the river was high and submerged the stones, it would remind Israel of how serious the conditions were when God cut off the flooding river. So two groups of twelve stones, one on the riverbed and one nearby are set up to memorialize Israel's crossing of the Jordan.

### **The responsibility to teach Israel's descendants (4:19-24)**

In keeping with the instruction of the LORD, Joshua sets up a monument at Gilgal with the twelve stones that had been taken from the Jordan. He repeats earlier instruction for the Israelites to use the memorial as a tool for teaching their children.

### **God commits to parents the responsibility of passing on to their children word of what He has done**

When a child asked the significance of the memorial, a Jewish father wasn't to send his inquisitive child to the Levite priest for the answers to his questions. The father was to answer the questions himself.

This isn't the first time that Israelite parents are told that it is their responsibility to pass on to their kids the words and works of God:

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 – “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Deuteronomy 6:20-24- “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?’” tell him: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.’”

When I served as a Youth Pastor at Pleasant View Bible Church in Indiana, one of my responsibilities was to lead in the development of a purpose statement that defined the purpose of our youth ministry. I remember distinctly that the first line in our purpose statement began with the words, “We will assist the home by....”

Why did we state our purpose this way? We recognized that Scripture holds parents ultimately responsible for teaching their children and that our job was to assist them, not take over. It isn't the church's or pastor's responsibility ultimately to teach our kids what God has done. As the pastor of JBC, I desire to train, assist, equip, and encourage parents in any way I can, I desire to teach children as I have opportunity, but I do so with the understanding that this responsibility is first and foremost that of a child's parents. Schools can't do our job for us, not even Christian schools. Sunday School teachers can help us, but they can't do our job for us either. It is our responsibility to teach our kids. God wants us to teach our kids what God has done for us, so that they in turn will learn to trust in Him too.

The objection is sometimes raised, “What about children who don't grow up in Christian homes? Who will teach them what God has done?” Obviously, in these cases, mentors or folks who are willing to adopt these youth as “spiritual parents” are needed. Misty and I have had the joy of this kind of a relationship with some of the youth from our previous church. Even though we stepped in and provided instruction that was not being provided at home, we still recognized that God's ideal is that a parent provide this teaching. In recognition of this principle, we sought to lead mom and dad to Christ recognizing that the best thing for the child we were training would be for his or her parents to trust Christ and enter into the training process.

That parents are ultimately held accountable for teaching their children is not just an Old Testament concept. Ephesians 6:4- “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

God gave Israel a memorial of twelve stones intending for it to serve as a tool to spark interest in children and cause them to ask questions which provided parents with important teachable moments.

**When children ask, “What does this mean?”**

**Tell them what God did for us**

Tell them, “Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.”

**Tell them why God did this**

**God did it so all peoples will know the LORD’s hand is powerful**

The text makes it clear that the miracle of Israel crossing the Jordan on dry ground communicated loud and clearly to all nations at the time how powerful God is. Joshua 5:1- “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.”

Here we see God’s concern for all mankind. The Canaanites could never argue that they didn’t trust in God because they never had any clear demonstrations given to them of His power and presence. They received a very clear demonstration that He is the One and only Sovereign God. Sadly, however, instead of responding in faith as Rahab did, the majority continue to reject God in pursuit of their worthless idols and wicked ways. They refuse to acknowledge who He really is.

**God did it so that Israel will fear Him**

What does it mean to fear God? To fear God simply means to hold Him in the highest regard, to treat him with the highest respect, to hold Him in awe.

I appreciate how author Robert Hubbard, Jr. captures what it means to fear God in the following quote:

“In ‘fear’ one responds to the greatness, majesty, and mystery of God. One squarely faces the gaping gap that divides Almighty God from puny humans. Biblical ‘fear’ includes an element of ‘dread’ and ‘alarm’ at the thought of God. One senses a slight quickening of the pulse, a little sweating, a minor tensing of muscles, a feeling of being ill-at-ease. But such feelings derive from the awe that God’s wondrous nature inspires in us, not from a dread of divine irritability. They reflect visceral (or emotional) recognition that God truly is awesome! In sum, to fear God is simply to take him very, very seriously—and to live accordingly.”

How did Israel do at passing on the truth of what God had done from one generation to another? In Judges 2:8-10, we read one of the most tragic accounts from all of Israel’s history-

“Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.”

In only two generations, Israel forgot. In spite of the memorial, Israel forgot.

### **Applications For Today:**

**We need to pass on the memory of God’s work because when our memory fails, our faith falters**

Kenneth Gangel writes, “Faith requires that we look forward, but it also requires that we look back. Someone has said, ‘The greatest enemy of faith may be forgetfulness.’ If we forget how God has worked and provided in the past, we may fail to trust him for the future.”

Israel’s fathers and mothers failed to pass on to their children the truth of what God had done. The result—their kids didn’t know the LORD or what He had done for Israel.

What God did in causing the waters of the Jordan to stand in a heap for Israel was forgotten. The result-The people of Israel forgot the LORD and rebelled against Him by doing what was right in their own eyes.

Just one generation later, the nation was involved in materialism, idolatry, and the worst sorts of immorality. We set our children up for spiritual meltdown when we fail to teach them what God has done for us.

**Reminders of what God has done for us in the past encourage us to trust Him in the present**

For our children, the houses we live in have proven to be memorials of God's work. Each time our family has been at a point of transition where we needed to move, we have watched God work in incredible ways to meet our needs.

Church buildings can also serve as memorials. I think of Sower Bible Church in Puebla Mexico. My previous church in Warsaw, IN was asked by the leaders of the Sower Bible Church to help them build a chapel for their growing congregation. That same summer, we were asked by one of our church planting missionaries to bring a ministry team to minister in Pachuca, Mexico. The leadership of Pleasant View Bible Church felt God was leading us to do both. The cost of this mission trip including building materials, air fare, lodging, and meals was \$50,000. The presence of a beautiful chapel at Sower Bible Church is a reminder to me of the powerful work of God.

The church building here at JBC is a memorial of God's Work.

When we look at these memorials of what God has done in the past and refresh our memory, it serves to help us trust Him with the struggles of the present. Friends of JBC, if God can provide for my family as He did this summer, if He can provide \$50,000 dollars for a missions trip, if He can provide a building like we have for our congregation, if God could do all this, we can trust Him to supply for the needs of the present and future.

How are we doing at providing our children with reminders of God's Word and work to foster their faith in Him? What reminders have we established to help us recall what God has done for us? What reminders have we established to help our children recall what God has done for our family? Is there something in our yard or house that is designed to cause our children to ask "What does this mean?" so we can tell them what God has done for us? What have we done to help our kids remember a time when God provided for our family's need? What have we done to help our kids remember when God intervened to protect us? What evidence do our kids see at our house of God's work in our lives?

### **Remembering what God has done isn't only for the benefit of God's people, but all the nations**

God intended for word to get out to all the nations of His power through what He did on Israel's behalf. Likewise, He would have word about what He has done for us to spread to the people in our community, region, and world.

God doesn't bless us as His people just for our comfort and welfare. He blesses us so that others will see what God has done, acknowledge His greatness, and see their need to trust in Him.

## **The stakes are high--If we fail to model and teach God's Word, it takes only one generation for degeneration to take place**

It seems impossible that in a couple of generations people could forget God and what He has done for them. But isn't that exactly what we see in our country today.

Consider an earlier warning that God had made to Israel:

Deuteronomy 8:7-14- "Deuteronomy 8:7-14 (NIV)—"For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "

Does God's warning of Israel remind you of anything similar today?

Gene Getz asks some good questions at this point- "What is happening in your home and mine? What will our children remember about us? Will they remember a beautiful home, big-screen television, video players, computer games, fast cars, a vacation home, a speedboat, an open-ended allowance—and all the frantic efforts we put forth to accumulate and keep these possessions?" He goes on to write, "Don't misunderstand....Material things...are not the issue. Our attitude toward them—and God—is! The children of Israel became materialists. They took the credit for their blessings. Eventually they turned away from God to false gods—the gods of a pagan society. And, in the process, they failed to teach their children their sacred history."

What are our children learning from us? Are we passing on the Word of God and testimony of His work to our kids? By God's grace, may the memory of God's Word and work in our kids be fresh and their faith strong through our faithful application of Joshua 4.