

A Study of the Book of Joshua

Sermon # 4

“Remembering What God Has Done”

Joshua 4

God realizes that we often forget what he has done for us. In Deuteronomy. 6:12 Moses issued a final warning to Israel just before they entered the promise land, *“beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt...”* The meaning of the Hebrew word for memorial (v. 7) is *“to remember.”* Given man’s propensity to forget it is little wonder then that memorials have frequently played an important role in biblical history. At the foot of Mt. Sinai, Moses built an altar of stones to commemorate God’s covenant with Israel (Ex. 12:14) . Now in tonight’s text we see God command his people to erect a memorial.

Notice that according to verse one, *“when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD gave more specific instructions in verses 2-5, “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, (3) and command them, saying, ‘Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.’” (4) Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; (5) and Joshua said to them: “Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel.”*

According to these verses twelve men choose earlier (3:12) were to go back to where the priest were standing in the middle of the river, holding the ark. Each man was to pick up a large rock or stone from the middle of the Jordan and carry it to the side of the river where Israel would camp in the land of Canaan.

Notice with me three reasons that is given for this action.

1. IT IS TO BE A TIME OF REMEMBERING WHAT GOD HAS DONE

“And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.” (v. 7)

First, the memorial stones were to be a reminder of their own personal experience. Notice that in verse six this memorial will cause the children to ask; *“What do these stones mean to you?”* These stones are first of all to be a reminder those who were present of their personal experience, what they saw, heard and felt. *“Tell your story, Keep a clear memory of what God did for you. Keep on telling your stories so that you never lose your own sense of awe and wonder of what God has done in your life.”*

I want you to consider with me: *“What kind of memorials do you have in your life?”* Whether you realize it our not we all have memorials in our lives, no not a monument of stones, but one built of memories.

There are *memories of places*, places that trigger memories just as the memorial stones in Gilgal. There are some significant places in your life that elicit memories. The little church where I was saved is such a place for me. It was there that I was saved as a teenager. It was there a few years later that I was called to preach. It was there that I was married by a lovely bride. It is a special place for me. It reminds me of things that God had done in my life. You no doubt have such a place in your life.

There are *memories of people*. These are memories of people who God has used in your life. For me many of them are the people who encouraged me to pursue the ministry.

But how often do we sit down and think about the memories, and thank God for those people He's used in our lives?

(Let me share an illustration drawn from the life of W. A. Criswell. Many of you may be aware that the Southern Baptist Pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, W.A. Criswell, passed away in January. Criswell records an event in his life that I think illustrates this point. *"When Criswell was 10 years old, the Texline church his family attended held a revival meeting with Dallhart pastor, Johnny Hicks. Hicks stayed in the Criswell home where he came to know the young preacher-to-be. During the morning service that week (they had services both day and night)he walked to the front of the church auditorium where Pastor/Evangelist Hicks met him and led him to Christ...."*

Years later Criswell was conversing with a friend, a fellow pastor in Dallas. He told of his childhood conversion during the Johnny Hicks revival meeting. Criswell went on to tell the story of how Hicks stayed in his home and enjoyed his mother's cooking, and his interest in the lad, and how Criswell went forward and was met by the evangelist at the altar.

Criswell's friend shook his head sadly, "Johnny Hicks. Just a few years ago I visited my friend Johnny Hicks at Baylor Hospital here in Dallas. He was dying. And on his deathbed he said, 'I haven't done anything for Jesus' Isn't that something? That dear old man thinking that he had failed.'" [Keith Basham. The Baptist Preacher. January/

February 2002. "The Greatness of Small Things." p. 23]

There are *memories of experiences*, of God's answering prayer and of God's marvelous hand of provision. I remember in seminary how God always provided for our needs. We learned some invaluable lessons on faith. These lessons on faith are not something you can be taught, it is something that you must experience to truly understand.

There are also *mementos of the past*. If you were to come into my office and look around you would see miscellaneous objects that are reminders to me of life experiences, mission trips, etc. Each of those objects triggers memories of what happened then, of the things that God did and that I experienced, experiences that have changed my life. I look at the little wooden elephant and I see again the expression on the custom inspector's face when she opened my suitcase and discovered 200 little wooden elephants (one for each family in the church). When I see it, I see and hear and can almost smell the sensations of being in India. I think of the service with over 4,000 in attendance and no one of the people owned a car. I see the expressions on their faces as they worshipped and sang, even when I could not understand one word.

The point is that God knows how we think and that is the reason that he instructs Joshua to build a memorial. So that each time the Israelites saw it they would be reminded that they had not crossed the Jordan on their own ability, their own strength but because of God. [*principles gleaned from - John A Huffman. Jr. The Communicator's Commentary: Joshua. Chapter Five. "The Importance of Memories." 4:1-24. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986.) pp. 80-88*]

I challenge you to spend sometime thinking through your memorial stones, let them draw you closer to God and remind you of His faithfulness.

Secondly, the Memorial stones were to serve as a basis of sharing faith with their children (vv. 6-7). In two places in this chapter, parents are reminded of their responsibility for the communication of God's Word and his calling on their children, generation to generation. First in verse 6-7, *"that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' (7) Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."*

And again in verses 21-23, *"Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' (22) then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; (23) for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over,*

As with other memorials in the Old Testament, the intention of the memorial was to provoke questioning especially from future generations. Christianity is never more than one generation away from extinction. If we are not careful America could well be the exhibit "A" for this truth. Just think for a moment how far our country has drifted away from its foundation in just one generation.

1962 - Prayer in schools is declared illegal

1963 - Bible reading in Schools

1980 – declared illegal to post the Ten Commandments in the schools

God's warning to Israel was not to let the environment of the pagan society that surrounded them dictate their values.

Deuteronomy 6:12-15

"then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (13) You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. (14) You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (15) (for the LORD your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth".

Third, the memorial stones were to be a signpost to a lost world. (v. 24)

“that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

It has always been God’s plan that the whole world should “know” that He is the only living God. Not only was the crossing of the Jordan a stirring event for Israel, but it was also a terrifying event for all the people living in the land of Canaan.

Not only a time of remembering what God had done but

2. IT WAS TO BE A TIME OF RENEWING PERSONAL COMMITMENT (v. 8)

“And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

Joshua not only issued the order for the men to go back but he personally joined them as they made their journey back to the center of the riverbed. The meaning of verse nine is widely debated among biblical commentators. *“Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.”* But it seems that while the men were carrying their stones back to the shore that Joshua personally picked up another twelve stones and built a memorial in the very center of the riverbed, as a personal act of worship. For Joshua this was a very private act. It was also representative of a pivotal point in his walk with God.

Once the twelve men have carried twelve stones to the shore of Canaan, and after Joshua has built his altar in the middle of the river, he commanded the priest to finished crossing the river with the Ark of the Covenant. Verse fifteen, *“Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, (16) “Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan.” (17) Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, “Come up from the Jordan.” (18) And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.”*

The moment that the feet of the priest touched the other side, the wall of water that had piled up for miles back up the river came crashing back into place.

Not only was it a time of renewing personal commitment but

3. IT WAS TO BE A TIME OF ROLLING AWAY OLD DEFEATS (vv. 19-20)

“ Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. (20) And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.”

It is significant that this happened on the tenth day of the first month, this is exactly forty years to the day, since Israel marched out of Egypt.

Leaving the edge of the river, the Israelites went to a place called Gilgal to make their camp. Gilgal was “on the eastern border of Jericho (v. 19). *Gilgal* means “*the reproach has been rolled away.*” Forty years of spiritual defeat and failure have been rolled away. It was the dawn of a great new beginning in a new land. The days of sullen refusal to respond to God under Moses were gone, complaining was ended, hopeless wandering in the wilderness was behind them. They were now a people with a powerful new sense of purpose, determined to take new territory with God. Likewise for the believer today we should be able to look back and see those monumental occasions which stand out as times in which God has changed our directions and give us new hope and a new sense of purpose. A time when we by an act of bold faith decide to abandon ourselves to God and step out into the unknown to take new territory for Him.

The monument that was built with those twelve stones was to serve as a visible reminder of the faithfulness of God. It was also a silent monument to the special day on which the people of God boldly placed their feet in the surging, rushing current of the Jordan, confident that God would see them to safety on the other side.