

## **A Memorial Stone Moment**

### **Joshua 3-4**

#### **WELCOME**

Good morning...Happy Independence Day...

#### **1 Tim. 2:1-4**

**1** First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, **2** for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. **3** This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, **4** who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

So we want to do that this morning, before we jump into our message from Joshua, we want to pray for our country and our leaders...

#### **PRAYER**

#### **INTRO & REVIEW**

I want to invite your attention to Joshua 3 in the Old Testament. This summer we are doing a quick walkthrough of the major events in Joshua, and I just want to give a quick review of where we've been and where we are in the story so far.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for us. At this point in Israel's history, they have been led through the desert after being freed from slavery in Egypt and now they are at the edge of the promised land. Moses, the greatly loved and respected leader has died and the Lord calls Joshua to take his place as the new leader of the nation. And we saw in the opening passage of the book, God's call on Joshua to be strong and courageous, to trust in God's promises and his presence as he leads Israel.

Chapter 2, last week, we walked through the account of Rahab, a prostitute in the city of Jericho. Jericho is the first stop in Israel's journey into the promised land. And so they sent two spies to check out Jericho, Rahab harbored the spies and made a confession of faith, desiring to be spared from the coming judgment. The spies make an oath that she and her family would be spared if she tied a scarlet cord in the window. And we talked about the great picture of redemption that Rahab's life

demonstrated. A Gentile prostitute, is brought out of a place of judgment and finds a home among God's people.

## THIS MORNING

Well, today we are going to pick up the pace a bit more in our walkthrough and I want us to look at a major event that spans chapters 3 and 4. And it is the moment when Israel crosses the Jordan River into the Promised Land and the actions they take immediately after.

### Joshua 3:1-6

**1** Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. **2** At the end of three days the officers went through the camp **3** and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. **4** Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length [**about 1,000 yards**]. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." **5** Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." **6** And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

So, we see here at the beginning of chapter 3, the day had *finally* arrived. I mean, imagine it. The nation of Israel had been slaves for 400 years in Egypt dreaming of the day that they could freely live in a land of their own. God miraculously rescues them and leads them into the wilderness heading to a land that he had promised them. But, due to doubt and rebellion, Israel faces judgment and are caused to wander for another 40 years before getting to the promised land. And finally, they are at the edge of the land, they can see it in the distance, and Joshua and the officers tell the people, "OK, it's time. Here's is the plan..."

The priests would carry the ark of the covenant and lead the nation to the river so they could cross it.

And if you don't know what the ark of the covenant was, it was a box that had on it's cover cherubim, two angels facing each other with wings spread out, and it contained important artifacts from Israel's history, such as the ten commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod. In fact, I have picture of a few priests carrying the ark...

### [PICTURE]

It's an understatement to say that the ark was a significant piece of Israel's life and history. It would be placed in the tabernacle, and eventually the temple, behind the veil in an area called the Holy of Holies, because the mercy seat was where God would

dwell among his people. That is where the priest would splatter the blood of the sacrifice on behalf of the sins of the people. We need to understand as the priests would carry the ark out that day, it was a visual reminder of God's presence with his people. God was the one leading Israel to the promised land.

In fact, this is exactly what Joshua is reminding them of...

#### **Joshua 3:9-11**

**9** And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God." **10** And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. **11** Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan.

Joshua says, the fact that the ark is going out before you is so that you will know 2 things.

First, again, that God is among you. In other words, remember that our God is not merely observing us from a distance. God is not simply looking down from his throne watching how we will act. No, he is here with us, leading us.

But, second, it is meant to offer them assurance that God "without fail" will drive out the inhabitants of the land. And this was massively important for them to hear. Because it was telling them, as amazing as this day will be when we miraculously cross the Jordan River, it is only the beginning. There will be many more tests, many more trials, many more battles that still lie ahead for us. This moment is meant to be a moment that encourages them to face them with confidence and perseverance. In other words, for Israel, the present miracle they were about to experience was meant to give assurance of future victory.

We'll talk more about that as we walk into the next chapter, but look what happens at the end of chapter 3...

#### **Joshua 3:14-17**

**14** So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, **15** and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), **16** the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. **17** Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

So, Israel experiences a miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. As the priests step into the river, the water, rather than flowing as normal, stops flowing and instead piles up in a heap. And it's worth noting that this isn't a small creek or river. In fact, the text is careful to point out that it is flood season as they cross, and during this time the Jordan could be up to 100 feet wide and up to 10 feet deep.

But as they step in the brink of the water, it is miraculously parted for the people of Israel to cross on dry ground. And that, of course, reminds us of another similar story doesn't it?

If you remember the Exodus, when Israel leaves Egypt, led by Moses they come to the Red Sea. Pharaoh changes his mind about letting them go and send his army after them. And if you remember the scene, God miraculously parts the waters of the Red Sea for Israel to cross to the other side.

And we shouldn't miss the connection here in Joshua. There is a miraculous crossing by God's people at *both* the exodus in Egypt and at the Jordan at the Promised Land. In fact in Joshua 4, we are told that all of this happened on the "tenth day of the first month," which happens to be the same day, just 40 years later, that they experienced the original Passover that led them out of Egypt.

What we should notice here is that the original *exodus* event led to an *arrival* event. God did not bring his people into the wilderness simply to wander. There was a coming day when they would be brought into the promised land.

And it is the same with our salvation. At our conversion, we are freed from the slavery of sin and death and Satan, but we are not left to wander aimlessly in the desert of life. There is a sure, coming day when our exodus will be completed with an arrival. God does not just forgive us of our sins and leave us as is. He will bring us all the way home.

In what has been called the "Golden Chain" of salvation, Paul explains this truth in Romans 8...

**Romans 8:29-30**

**29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Understand, that in eternity past God set his love upon you, he has called you to himself, and in so doing has justified you, declaring you righteous in Christ. But that is not all that he has done. Paul say *all* those who are justified will be glorified. There is an exodus but there is also an arrival.

And, of course, this is good news. This is good news when you feel like maybe God has forgotten about you. That maybe God really doesn't have a good plan for your life and eternity. If you've put your repentant faith in Christ, you will be ultimately glorified with Christ for all eternity.

So, chapter 3 ends with the nation of Israel across the Jordan and finally in the promised land, but the Lord's instructions are not done. Look what he instructs Joshua to do as we walk into chapter 4...

#### **Joshua 4:1-7**

**1** When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, **2** "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, **3** and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" **4** Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. **5** And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, **6** that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' **7** then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."

God has Joshua set up a memorial made of stones to mark this momentous occasion in Israel's history. We understand this practice; we do the same thing today. We put up plaques and statues, preserve historic homes and buildings, and other things to commemorate that something special or unique happened there.

And so they were to do the same there at the Jordan River as a means of remembering this moment when God protected and provided for his people. It was a way to point people to the truth that something special happened here, in this place.

And this isn't the only time in the Bible Israel does this. This was a regular practice for them. For example, Jacob set up memorial stones at Bethel in Gen. 28 after meeting God in a dream. Moses set up memorial stones at Mt. Sinai after having received the law from God in Ex. 24. Joshua will set up other memorial stones at the end of the book of Joshua when they renew the covenant at Shechem in Joshua 24.

And there are other examples, but all that to say, this was a regular practice for the people of Israel. And they were called to do that for a very important reason and it is a reason that we can relate to all too well.

***And that reason is: one of the greatest obstacles to our faith is forgetfulness.***

You and I, like the people of Israel, are far too prone to forget who God is and what he has done, both in history and in our lives, and this has a real impact on our lives.

We can be anxious when we forget that God is in control.

We are timid when we forget that we are indwelled and empowered by the Spirit of God.

We can grow bitter and seek revenge when we forget the omniscience and justice of God.

We become unforgiving when we forget the grace that was extended to us in the gospel.

We can be enamored with the world around us when we forget there is a better world waiting for us.

We swell up in pride when we forget that it was our sins that Jesus paid for by the shedding of his blood on the cross.

We become discouraged and disheartened in our relationship with God when we forget his steadfast love and mercy shown toward us even when we fail him.

And in so many other ways, our faith falters when our minds are forgetful.

And so, we need to remember.

Remember who God is - his nature, his character, his promises.

Remember what God has done - how has he worked in history, what has he done in the gospel, what he has promised to do in the future.

Remember who we are in Christ - what is our identity, where is our citizenship, how do we relate to one another.

Again, we need to remember because **forgetfulness will always hinder our faith**. In fact we might even say we ought to develop the spiritual discipline of remembrance. Because, just as forgetfulness impacts our faith, remembering will shape our faith as well...

### **3 Reasons to Remember from the life of Israel:**

#### **1. Remembering Strengthens our Faith**

##### **Joshua 3:10**

**10** And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

For Israel, at the Jordan River, the present miracle, which would eventually be looked upon as something in the past, was meant to assure them of future victory.

One commentator explained, “If Yahweh can tame a raging river, he can also repel attacking Amorites. If he can stop up the Jordan, he can put down the Girschites. If he can get you into the land, he can surely give you the land.”

He would go on to call this “theo-logic.” That is, there is logical assurance of God’s good work to be had, but that assurance is not based on our feelings and emotions, or on our own understanding of every circumstance we face, or on our own strength and control over our lives. There is real, logical assurance for our faith based on the person and work of God, derived from our biblical theology.

The apostle Paul would argue the same thing again in Romans 8...

**Romans 8:31-32**

**31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

**32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Here Paul is using his “theo-logic” to assure the believers in Rome of the certainty of their salvation based on the omnipotence and generous love of God. If God would go so far as to give his Son for us, won’t he, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe, see that work through in our salvation?

For Israel, if God showed his faithfulness and power by bring us this far, won’t he bring us all the way?

The same is true for us today: remembering what God has done in the past ought to strengthen your faith in the present and the future. But we must be careful to remember.

Remembering strengthens our faith, but...

**2. Remembering Corrects our Misplaced Faith**

**Deuteronomy 8:11-18**

**11** “Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, **12** lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, **13** and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, **14** then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who

brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, **15** who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, **16** who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. **17** Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' **18** You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

We are warned that **if we are prone to forget the goodness of God in our lives, who he is and what he has done, we are prone to start believing that we are god.** And our faith will move from having faith in God to having faith in ourselves. And we should take this warning very seriously, because in our flesh we are all too ready to steal the throne of our lives back from God.

But remembering God, thinking through those moments in your life where He showed himself strong and faithful, will recalibrate/ correct our faith...it's not me who has delivered me, it's not me who has protected me, it's not me who has saved me. No, it was God.

**Forgetfulness is dangerous to your faith, so we need to remember to correct our misplaced faith.**

**3. Remembering Creates New Faith** (Joshua 4:6-7) - Israel was meant to point to those stones as a way of not only reminding themselves of what God had done there, but also as a way of telling their children and their grandchildren of God's graciousness and faithfulness.

When we are active in remembering God's work in our lives, not only will we strengthen our faith, God might even use it to birth new faith in others. Don't be afraid to speak of how God has worked in your life.

Are you doing that with others? Parents, are you doing that with your kids? Grandparents, are you doing that with your grandkids? Are they familiar with the ways in which God has worked not only in Scripture, but also in your own personal life? Have you shared the ways in which God has been faithful to you? Have you shared how God brought you to Himself and how he has changed your life?

If we do, God might, by his grace, create new faith in them.

In fact, this is one of the beauties of the local church. This, what we might call “missional remembrance,” is a part of our identity.

After our sermon series through Joshua, this fall we are planning on going through 1 Peter, and I’ll give you a little sneak peek, because Peter offers an incredible word picture about the identity of the local church and the mission of proclaiming the work of the Lord.

**1 Peter 2:4-5**

**4** As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5** you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So, a few things here. First, Jesus is a “living stone,” later referred to as the “cornerstone” on which the church, like a spiritual house is built. But Peter also refers to us as believers as “living stones.” And this describes a few important truths.

We are “living,” that is we are alive in Christ, the One who is alive. And that is incredibly important and glorious, but consider what that also means in light of the history of memorial stones.

When people passed by those stones in the OT they needed someone to explain to them what they were there for. However, “living stones” can speak for themselves. We have the ability and the opportunity to declare - something significant has happened here. This is who God is; this is what God has done for me.

**ILLUS** - Filippo - “Where can I see the work of Jesus today?” I said, “Come to church with me and I will introduce you to many people who have been changed by Jesus.” What was I doing? Pointing him to living memorial stones.

This is why the local church is so important to your spiritual health, because what does the church do? We practice remembrance.

-When we gather together we have the opportunity to look around the room this morning and remember the work of God in the gospel in the lives of others than just ourselves.

-We sing together, hearing the truths we need reminding of found in the lyrics of the songs but also hearing the voices sing those truths next to us reminds us of the reach of the gospel.

-We spend time in God’s Word, thinking on truths that we speak of time and time again, that God is holy, that we are sinners, that God in his love sent his Son to live the perfect life we could not live, and go to the cross as our substitute, that Jesus rose again from the dead, and that through our faith in the finished work of Christ God graciously forgives us and adopts us into his family.

These are the truths we speak of week in and week out, because we forget them so easily.

-We observe the ordinances of the Lord's Supper & Baptism reminding us of gospel truths.

Certainly we always need to learn new truths, that is good and right, but so much of the ministry and so much of our discipleship is pointing one another back to familiar truths time and again, and we do that because we are so forgetful.

## **CONCLUSION**

We must be careful to remember God and his work, and when we do, our faith will be strengthened, it will bring about new faith in others, and it will correct or refocus our faith to God and not ourselves.

## **REFLECTION**

What are some of those memorial stone moments in your life? Are you thinking on them? Are you talking about them?

The greatest act of deliverance is coming to faith in Christ. Do you regularly reflect on how God brought you to that moment and the promise of where that will eventually take you? Are you talking about it?

Of course, none of us do as much as we ought, but the good news for us this morning and every day after is that though we are so quick to forget the Lord, he never forgets his people. The Lord remembers you when you forget him. And he is faithful to you when you are faithless.

If you've never put your faith in Christ...

## **COMMUNION**

This morning we have the privilege and opportunity to remember the sacrifice of Jesus for us by way of observing the Lord's Supper.

Paul, in writing to the church in Corinth, reminded them of the opportunity for remembrance in the Lord's Supper.

### **1 Cor. 11:23-26**

**23** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in

my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Again, when we eat the bread we are reminded that Jesus, the Son of God, humbled himself by taking on flesh and allowing that flesh to be torn for us. When we drink the cup we are reminded that Jesus spilled his blood for remission of our sins. As our perfect sacrifice we stand in Christ, justified by faith, awaiting the time we will be glorified with him for all eternity.

So, if you've put your faith in Christ, you are welcome to join us in observing the Lord's Supper.

## **VERSES**

1 Tim. 2:1-4

Joshua 3:1-6

[PICTURE]

Joshua 3:9-11

Joshua 3:14-17

Romans 8:29-30

Joshua 4:1-7

Joshua 3:10

Romans 8:31-32

Deuteronomy 8:11-18

1 Peter 2:4-5

1 Cor. 11:23-26

## **SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE**

How does remembering the person and work of God in the gospel strengthen our faith?

How does remembering the person and work of God in the gospel correct our misplaced faith?

Spend the rest of the time remembering and sharing the ways in which God has worked in your life personally, especially the way he brought you to faith in Christ.