



A Reminder to Remember

Joshua #4 • January 25, 2026

Opening

“Something big happened here!”

Humans have a propensity to put up reminders of significant events.

- If you are in Dallas, you can see the spot where JFK was assassinated.

Anyone been there?

- If you are in Winslow AZ, you can see the corner where the Eagles (and Travis Tritt) sang about in the song “Take it Easy”

Anyone been there?

- If you are in Hawaii, you can see the memorial for the U.S.S. Arizona that sank during the attack on Pearl Harbor

Anyone been there?

Such memorials have become tourist stops, places to check off your bucket list. And those are just a few of the hundreds (if not thousands) of places marked in the United States alone. Statues, monuments, and signs draw attention to historical sites and buildings. They mark Civil War battlegrounds, old west cattle trails, and life-changing court cases.

Privately, gravestones and cemeteries and highway-adjacent crosses with flowers hold significance for individuals and loved ones of a personal event or tragedy. **Publicly**, monuments are there for everyone to notice.

They are reminders to remember.

So, when we come to our Scripture passage today, the community memorials we read about won’t seem out of place...they will be a shared point of connection that spans centuries and cultures. The **reminder** stones in the story will be familiar, and they are going to provide encouragement to us **to remember**.

Recap

As we continue our sermon series in the book of Joshua today, we’ll be in chapters 3-4. This is a bigger chunk of verses than we’ve looked at before,



but the verses together cover one significant event. In today's passage, the Israelites are going to cross the Jordan River! (Woot Woot!) After forty years since their rescue from slavery in the land of Egypt, and after hundreds of years since the promise was made to Abraham, the nation of Israel is finally going to set foot in the Promised Land!

It's a big moment for the people, and especially for Joshua. After taking over as leader of the people, this is the moment when the people see him as someone special – as someone who has been elevated by God Himself!



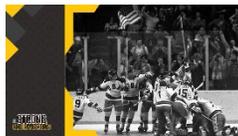
“That day the Lord made Joshua a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites, and for the rest of his life they revered him as much as they had revered Moses.” (Joshua 4:14, NLT)

So, what happens? In today's sermon we will cover a **significant moment**, and then a **significant memory**...and then my prayer is that God will give us a **significant reminder to remember!**



A Significant Moment (Joshua 3)

Let's start with a **significant moment**.



Back in 1980, the United States Men's Olympic hockey team faced a massive challenge. Our national team, comprised of collegiate players assembled from across the country, had been developing into a quality team under the leadership of coach Herb Brooks. But in the medal round, the Americans faced a four-time defending gold medalist team comprised of professional-level players with significant international experience. That team also happened to be our global rival and Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union.

The game was supposed to be a blowout win for the Soviets. But it wasn't! The Americans scored a last second goal to tie the game 2-2 at the end the first period. They fell behind by a goal in the second. But in the third, the team somehow managed to tie the game and then pull ahead with ten minutes left. For the final half of that period, the Americans fought off a ferocious attack and stopped everything the USSR tried. Sportscaster Al Michaels made the call that cemented the game in history.

"11 seconds, you've got 10 seconds, the countdown going on right now!... Five seconds left in the game! **Do you believe in miracles? YES!**"

The United States won! But, as significant as that game was, it did NOT win them the gold medal. They only won gold after defeating Finland days later¹...a game which hardly anyone talks about.

If we are comparing hockey to the nation of Israel (because who doesn't! So cliché...), today's story is the gold medal game against Finland. Everyone talks about the other game, but this is the one that makes it matter.



The Israelites' equivalent of "*Do you believe in miracles?*" was their crossing of the Red Sea. After God sent a series of ten plagues on the nation of Egypt, the people had arrived at the shore of this body of water. The king of Egypt, in a moment of regret, was pursuing the slaves he just let go. His army was threatening! But instead of being killed or captured, the Israelites were miraculously rescued when God parted the water and allowed them to pass through to the other side. Pharaoh's army was defeated when they tried to follow, when God caused the waters to close in over them. It was a powerful victory! The situation, the politics, the army, the drama made this one memorable.

But it is a **different** miracle that happens in Joshua 3 (in today's passage) that makes what happened at the Red Sea **matter**. If Israel had been rescued through the Sea but never made it to their destination, it would be like Team U.S..A. winning against the Soviets but never getting the gold. THIS is where it resolves.

If you have your Bible, turn to Joshua 3 and let's see what takes place.

In verses 1-6, the people move their camp closer to the Jordan River, and they are given instructions: **consecrate** yourselves and **be ready to follow** the priests carrying the **Ark of the Covenant** (the artifact God chose to equate with His presence). Hang back about **half a mile** and **watch**, because God is about to do **wonders** among you. Let's pick things up in verse 7:

"The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. Give the command to the people when you carry the Ark of the Covenant." When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there."

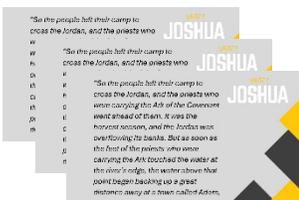


¹ [Miracle on Ice - Wikipedia](#)

as I was with Moses. Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: ‘When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there.’ ” So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the Lord your God says. Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of you. Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! Now choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.”” (Joshua 3:7–13, NLT)

So here we are with another body of water, and another miraculous crossing! This one lacks the level of drama of the previous story – there is no army chasing them this time, and a river (even a river at flood stage) is still small compared to a Sea. The miracle here in Joshua 3 doesn’t seem quite as impressive when Joshua talks about it. Yet, it is still significant! This marks the moment when they received God’s promise! They will finally cross the River Jordan and enter the Promised Land.

And it happens, just like God said!



“So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river’s edge, the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho. Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.” (Joshua 3:14–17, NLT)

The Israelites finally entered the land...in dramatic fashion! And no one in that nation could have doubted the Power behind their entry. This was all

because of God! The people *knew*, and future followers of God would also point to this moment as memorable. They would sing:



*“Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man. He turned the sea into dry land; **they passed through the river on foot.** There did we rejoice in him, who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves.” (Psalm 66:5–7, ESV)*

This was a significant moment to remember!

Personalize It

Do you, today, have any similar moments? Can you point to a time when God did something big in your life? Don't be lazy and say, “Yeah, I'm sure He has.”



I want you to think of specifics! Don't answer out loud but write a few words or phrases to acknowledge His work. Where has He done something big?

- **What is a moment of rescue?** From substances or addiction, from poverty or danger?
- **What is a moment of blessing?** With new life, or new work, or new relationships?
- **What is a moment of miracle?** Of unnatural provision, of impossible victory?
- **What is a moment of healing?** From cancer, from depression, from devastation?
- **What is a moment of mercy?** From sin or rebellion, from disregard or disobedience?

I don't know your full story, but I know this: He *has* been at work and done amazing things **for** you, **to** you, or **through** you!

Do you remember any significant moments?



A Significant Memory (Joshua 4)

As the final people make their way past the priests, stepping past a few puddles and maybe a fish or two that are still flopping on the ground, God gives Joshua further instruction. He wants the people to have a **significant memory** of this action.



“When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, “Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, 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.’ ” Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 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, that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ 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.”” (Joshua 4:1–7, ESV)

A pile of rocks might not seem impressive, but it doesn’t need to be as big as a pyramid to be significant. It just needs to be unusual enough to get someone’s attention.



Hikers have often used piles of rocks (“cairns”) to mark trails and direction, because they stand out and are clearly not natural. The National Park Service maintains cairns in several parks to help guide hikers through terrain (and, yes of course, they have rules and guidelines for them!). But the rocks show something.



And in the Bible, people often used piles of rocks to mark moments of importance. In the book of Genesis, Jacob marks encounters with God by placing a stone (ex: Genesis 28:18; 31:45). In the book of 1 Samuel, the judge/prophet Samuel sets up a stone as a memorial

Side Note: *Samuel calls his stone “Ebenezer.” In a hymn we sing there is a line, “Here I raise my Ebenezer. Here by Thy great help I’ve come.” A reminder stone is what we’re singing about!*

God’s command to Joshua fits this pattern of memorials: a sizeable stone for each tribe, placed where people would notice it.

Joshua obeys God’s commands and has the stones piled up at their camp site (a location called Gilgal), and he adds a second memorial spot (of his

own accord) in the riverbed itself, before the priests climb out and the waters return. Both piles stood as reminders.



*“And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; **and they are there to this day.**”* (Joshua 4:9, ESV)

They were to stand there, begging for explanation. Kids would see them (probably try to climb them) and ask, “What’s up with the rocks?” And the parents would have an answer ready to share:

“Something big happened here!”

Personalize It



Where is your similar reminder of God’s actions? Can you point to anything on you, near you, or around you that reminds you of something big He did?

Point it out!

- **Are you wearing it?** Is it a ring that shows He united two people as one? Or is it a cross that has the date of the day He raised you to new life in baptism? Or a medal awarded from a battle where He spared you?
- **Are you bearing it on your body?** Is it a scar from a bypass surgery that He carried you through? Or a scar from a C-section that bears witness to a child He provided? Is it a one-year recovery coin from AA that reminds you of the sobriety He has helped you maintain?
- **Are you displaying it proudly?** Is it a verse that He has used to strengthen you, hanging in your office? Is it the first dollar from the business He used to provide for your family?

What is your “Ebenezer” that speaks of His actions? What could someone see and ask about that would prompt you to answer: **“SomeOne big acted here!”**

Do you have any significant reminders?



Reminder to Remember

If you have a significant moment and a significant memory of it, then let me challenge you today to **use that reminder to remember**.

Guys, there is a difference between getting a reminder and actively remembering!



- Your **alarm** can go off, but you still must choose to remember and get up for that early meeting.
- Your mom might tell you it's your **sister's birthday**, but you still must choose to remember and call her to sing "Happy Birthday."
- Your car's **instrument display** might say it's been over 5,000 miles since your last oil change, but you still must choose to remember and purchase 5 quarts of oil and filter to switch out tonight.

Don't treat reminders of God's work the same way you treat reminders of other things.

- We often see reminders and **ignore** them.
- We hear reminders and **shrug**.
- We read reminders and say, "*Oh, yeah. I had **forgotten** that until now.*"



The reminder helps; but you must actively choose to remember!

A reminder is worthless without present day remembering. God's past actions need to result in present trust!

What does "remembering" look like?

The passage in Joshua gives us an idea. If we *remember* what God has done, we should:

- **Look to Him.** His faithfulness in the past encourages us to know that He *can* act in the present and future. Instead of looking to yourself or others, the reminder of God's past actions should prompt you to look to Him now for help.
- **Follow Him.** If He acted before, remember that He knows what to do. Even if it doesn't make sense to you now, in obedience follow what He says. The reminder of His past actions should prompt you to accept His authority.

- **Speak of Him.** Your memory isn't just for yourself. It is encouragement for others. To remember means to carry on His legacy, letting the next generation hear about the way that He moved. The reminder of His past actions should be shared.
- **Revere Him.** Your worship shouldn't be dependent on an emotional time of praise and worship (or the quality of the experience); it should flow from an understanding of who He is and what He has done and what He is doing now. To remember is to gain fuel for reverence.

That's what it means to remember.

If you struggle to remember, know that God is right there to help.



“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26, ESV)

He will help you, so remember what He has done.

Closing



“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.” (Psalm 77:11, ESV)

For Joshua, it wasn't even wonders of old. It was deeds of the present! He was seeing God in action right then, right there! The river parted, the people claimed God's promise. It was a miraculous moment.

And for future generations, the reminders that Joshua established in stone would point to that memory. The stones would help others to know what kind of God they worshiped.

Church, your moments might look different. Your memories might not be in stone. But you have the same Helper! You trust the same God! So, take the moments and memories you have, and use those reminders to remember now...in the present!

Use them to share the message Joshua shared:



“He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord’s hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever.” (Joshua 4:24, NLT)

You have the moments. You have the memories. You have the Helper.

Remember, **“Something big happened here!”**



Prayer

Invitation

Maybe today is the day that something big happens. Maybe today is the day that you decide you’re tired of doing life on your own. Maybe today is the day you stop trying to do it your way and instead lay down your life and follow Jesus.

If we can help you, pray with you, guide you through that decision, then come forward and let us pray for you as we stand and sing our invitation song.

Sermon Notes

A Significant Moment (Joshua 3)

(Psalm 66:5–7)

A Significant Memory (Joshua 4)

(Genesis 28:18; 1 Samuel 7:12)

Reminder to Remember

(John 14:26; Psalm 77:11)

Sermon Discussion Questions

- As Joshua prepared the people to cross the Jordan River, what do you think the mood was? Try to imagine what feelings they had as they entered the Promised Land for the first time.
- Why was it important for the people to “consecrate” themselves before entering (Joshua 3:5)? How do *you* prepare for God to move?
- Which was more significant for Israel: crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14) or crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 3)? Explain.
- Where has God done something big in your life? Share a significant moment.
- What does God have Joshua build (read Joshua 4:4-7)? What was the purpose?
- How would you respond if you were an Israelite asked about the memorial stones? What parts of the story or what information about God would be most important to share?
- Can you point to anything on you, near you, or around you that reminds you of something big God has done?
- What is the difference between a “reminder” and “remembering”?
- Read John 14:26. How does the Holy Spirit help you remember what God has done? How can you listen to His reminders more clearly?