

Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace

Memorial Stones

Joshua 4:1-24

July 13, 2025

HDBC

Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley are not names that are listed in most history books. But these three men were heavy hitters when it came to the Protestant Reformation in England.

Cranmer was the Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII and then his son, Edward VI. Henry VIII was somewhat resistant to the reformation efforts. But his son, Edward, was very sympathetic. Sadly, he did not live long, dying as a teenager. He was succeeded by his half-sister, Mary, whom history has dubbed ***Bloody Mary***.

She was a staunch Catholic and intended to reverse all the progress made by the reformers and to snuff out the movement. She soon had her sights set on Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, for they were prominent leaders in the reformation movement. They were arrested in March 1554. They were placed in the infamous Tower of London and later transferred to the Bocardo prison in Oxford. They languished in prison for 17 months before being brought to trial. All three were condemned for their faith.

Latimer and Ridley were put to death on October 16. Paraded through Oxford, outside the gate of the city, to Broad Street. They were tied to a stake and burned to death. Latimer died quickly, but Ridley died a long, painful death. His friends added fuel in hopes of hastening his death, but it actually put out the fire, which had to be rekindled, lengthening his pain.

Just prior to the flames being lit, Latimer uttered words to Ridley that have encouraged generations of believers for the past 500 years. ***Be of good courage, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out.*** Cranmer was brought out to witness their deaths. It had a profound impact on him. He was shaken. In the months that followed the authorities

continued to press him to recant his faith. Ultimately, he began to crack and six times signed documents recanting his reformation faith and efforts. But it was not enough to gain his freedom. Mary was out for blood.

On March 21, 1556 he was brought St Mary's Church and given a chance to speak. It was thought that he would once more denounce his previous faith in order to win favor with the queen. He had a prepared statement. In it he asked God to forgive his sins. He paid homage to the crown, then recited the Apostles Creed. He had one more thing to add.

He said he had **written one thing contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart**. He then referred to the six papers which he has signed, denouncing his faith. He was recanting his recantation. He was once more declaring his protestant reformation faith.

The church exploded into pandemonium. He was quickly seized, dragged to the same spot where six months earlier he had watched his friends die. There, they lit a fire and waited for it to get hot enough. He then did something that shocked those watching. He thrust into the fire his right hand, shouting, **For as much as my hand offended writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished**. He was then cast into the fire where he joined his friends in martyrdom. As he died, he was heard to pray that the Lord would receive his spirit.

Today, at the intersection of St. Giles, Magdalen Street and Beaumont Street there is the Martyr's Memorial, commemorating the deaths of those three men. Out in the street there is a cross formed in the stones, marking the exact spot of their deaths. If I ever make it to England, I want to see it.

That monument and the small cross of stones were put there for a reason. They are there that people might remember what happened. They are there to extend the story of those courage martyrs to each succeeding generation of believers.

Memorials are important. Walk around any city and you will find them.

We have them in Jonesboro. Each one tells a story that should not be forgotten. Joshua 4 tells the story of a memorial.

Joshua 3 related the story of the crossing of the Jordan river by the Israeli people. Joshua 4 retells the story, but adds the part about a stone memorial being erected. It would be a perpetual reminder of the miraculous thing which the Lord had done. As we read this chapter, be aware that it is not really another chronological accounting of the crossing. It cuts back and forth from one thing to another.

Let's consider five things in this chapter.

1. A memorial is built (1-9)

1) Instructions from the Lord (1-3)

Immediately after the people had completed the crossing of the Jordan River, the Lord gave Joshua specific instructions concerning a memorial to be made of stones. He was to select 12 men, one from every tribe, to perform a very important task. Each man was to go back into the river and retrieve a huge rock from the place where the priests were holding the Ark. They were to bring these to the West Bank of the River.

They were then to **lay them down in the lodging place**. "lay them down" is the Hebrew for "cause them to rest." This is interesting. The more common word would have been the word for "set". Interesting that he would use a word that speaks of **rest**. May be a reminder that the promised land represented rest for the people.

2) Actions of the People (4-8)

The people responded to Joshua's instructions. Having been told exactly what to do, these twelve men walked back out to the middle of the still dry riverbed. Each man picked up a stone, large enough that it had to be carried on his shoulder. They brought them to the bank of the river.

Joshua, in these verses, revealed the reason for this action. The stones would be a reminder of the miracle of the crossing. We're going to come back to that later in the chapter.

After the twelve men had brought out their stones, Joshua personally went back into the river to the place where the priests remained. He set up a second memorial of stones. This one was placed in the very center of the riverbed, at the spot where the Ark had been held for the people.

Why this second memorial? It would be clear evidence that the riverbed had indeed been dry. If someone saw the pile of rocks on the bank and doubted the truth, they could go diving in the river and see a similar memorial under water.

2. The people are unified (10-13)

As I read these verses I'm reminded of just how unified the people were. All the groups were moving forward in the same direction and with the same purpose. The people, the priests, the warriors for Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. There were no dissidents. No splinter groups. No protesters.

The people hurried & crossed. No time for sight-seeing. They were a focused group as they crossed the Jordan. Their eyes were on the land before them, with no thought of the desert behind them.

One stone for each tribe would certainly be a reminder of the unity of the nation. They were not separate entities, but one unified nation.

3. Joshua is exalted (14)

God had promised to exalt Joshua in the eyes of the people. Verse 14 points out that this really happened. No surprise. What God says He will do, He will do. He has never failed to accomplish His word. As the people looked to Joshua they had confidence in him. They were ready to follow him into battle and into their new future.

4. The river is unrestricted (15-18)

Remember that chapter four is not a true chronological account of the crossing of the Jordan. In verse 11 we learned that the priests left the riverbed only after all the people had crossed and after all that God had commanded had been done. Now, in verse 15 we are given another look at that.

Here we seek that Joshua gave the command for the priests to come up with the Ark. This was the direct and specific instruction from the Lord. Reminder that **God was in total charge** of all that was happening that day. Joshua was very careful to get his instructions from the Lord.

Remember when the Jordan stopped flowing and began to dry up? 3: 13, 15. The Jordan ceased to flow at the very moment that the soles of the priests' feet entered the water of the Jordan.

Now, at the precise moment that their feet leave the Jordan, the waters begin to flow once again.

5. The purpose is explained (19-24).

Once again Joshua revealed the purpose of this memorial. It was built with three groups of people in mind.

1) The current generation of people

We would think that none of those people would forget that day. And in reality, they would not. But we tend to forget the significance of certain things. They might lose sight of the power of God, the provision of God, the protection of God, the plan of God.

2) The children of the current generation of people

None of these people would forget this day. It would be in their minds their entire lives. But they would have children and grandchildren. It was important that they pass down to their children their own ***faith experiences*** in order to build faith in their kids. The

memorial of stones would be a reminder to do so. And, in fact, it would likely cause their kids to ask about it.

3) The people of other nations (24)

God's glory was never meant to be confined to one nation or one people. His glory is to shine over the whole world and be seen and known by people from every nation, every tribe, every people.

You can tell a lot about a nation by the memorials that they erect. You can often tell what they believe, what they revere and what they value. This would be a sign to the nations that Israel was a nation which believed and followed the one true God, the God of creation. It was not a reminder of the sacrifices made by human beings, as important as they are, but of the power and providence of God. Those 12 stones sent a **theological message** to all who saw them.

Takeaways:

1. Memorials point to something important.

You don't erect memorials for ordinary things. When you see a memorial, it points to something big, something out of the ordinary, something worth remembering. Spiritual memorials point to spiritual events where the power of God was on display. This memorial was a reminder of a miracle of God. He doesn't do those every day. Don't minimize the importance of memorials. They are big deals.

2. We tend to forget, so spiritual memorials are important.

We tend to forget just how powerful God is, how good He is, how blessed we have been. We need spiritual reminders of the goodness of God.

3. Spiritual memorials are designed for multiple groups.

As with that monument of stones, the spiritual memorials in our lives are not designed just for our benefit, but for others. **Baptism is a memorial.**

It is a reminder of the grace of God that came to you, bringing forgiveness of sins. It points to your old life dying and to your new life that has begun. But your baptism was not just for you. It was for your family, for the church, for the community and for the nations.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial. But it's not just for you. It sends a message for others who see what we are doing.

4. Spiritual memorials can be personal and unique.

Meaning they can come in all shapes, sizes and forms. I've mentioned baptism and the Lord's supper, which came from Christ. We didn't design those and we can't change those. However, along your spiritual journey you can setup your own memorials. Some maybe very simple and others complex. But all designed to help us remember.

Writing the date of your salvation in your Bible is a memorial.
Hanging a picture of saying in your home can stimulate a reminder.
Ceremony or celebration that is unique to you and your family.
Missions wall in my office, reminders of great spiritual experiences.
License to ministry and ordination certificates.
Sign that you have that just you and your family know.
Certain place you go, or a certain thing you do.
Jan's brother's family sing the doxology before meals.

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering hear to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

Spiritual memorials draw us back to the God we love.