

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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January 1, 2023

New Years Day 2023

Joshua 4:1-7

4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, 2 “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 7 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. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

Good morning, everyone! What a fun service this is. Kids, can I hear from you one last time? Let me get a yell! (Kids yell back.) That was not very loud. Kids, one more time, let me hear a yell. (Kids yell louder.) There we go! There we go! This is a fun service!

Guys, my name is Derek Davidson, and I have the privilege of serving on staff as the Family Minister. Speaking of families, my family growing up was a ‘no video game’ household. Shouts from those of you who were like that, as well, or you’re like that right now. Which meant one thing: when I went to a friend’s house, I would play video games. I was a 90’s kid, so we were playing Donkey Kong, and Super Mario, and Zelda, and I remember those games. Something that was really important is that as you were going along the levels, or going along the world, you’d reach these things called checkpoints. When you reached that checkpoint, it meant that if you lost, you didn’t have to go back to the beginning. You would just go back to the checkpoint. Kids, have you guys ever played a game like that? (Cheers from kids.) Yeah, thank you. A couple of you have played a game like that. And it’s fun because it was really important. It marked how far you’d gone. And I thought about that as I was preparing for this morning because we have these moments in our lives that can be checkpoints.

The new year is a perfect time for a checkpoint for our lives and especially for our faith. But the problem is too often we just rush right past them. Kids, I know we said that Christmas isn’t about presents, but I want to hear from you. On the count of three, yell as loud as you can, your favorite present you got. Okay? Kids, not adults, thank you. One, two three! (Kids shout their answer.) Man! Those were awesome gifts that I didn’t hear! But again, why did we celebrate Christmas? Kids? (Kids call out answers.) Jesus! Because Jesus did what? (Kids call out various answers.) He *did* die on the cross, but not at Christmas. That’s at Easter. That’s a great guess, though. (Kids continue to call out answers.) He was born! That’s right, on Christmas Jesus was

born. Just last week we celebrated the amazing miracle of the incarnation, the greatest miracle, potentially, ever. But in two days, we go back to school. Some of you are already back at work, or you're about to be back at work. Sports are going to start back up. You're going to be traveling. You have wedding season. All these crazy things happen, and if we're not intentional, we're going to rush right past this moment that can be a checkpoint in our life.

So many of you, you're already doing that this morning. You're being intentional. You woke up, you came here, and you're celebrating the new year with your church family. Thank you for being here! But this isn't just a message about New Year's resolutions. Having goals, having things you want to change, those are amazing things, but this is a time for myself and for all of us to honestly assess where are we with God? We have a time, as the calendar changes, to be thoughtful and intentional. To check "Where am I with God?" Are there things that I picked up in this past year, or the last ten years, that I need to leave behind as this next year starts? Are there disciplines I need to pick up in the faith in this next year? Are there sins I need to leave behind? Are there relationships that I need to leave behind? Are there lessons that God taught me that I want to make sure I remember as I go into this next year, so I don't have to learn them again? Now is the time to assess where we are with God as this new year starts.

I realize for some of you this last year was really, really hard, and I'm so sorry. I'm really, really glad that you're here with us this morning. But, as hard as it will be, I think reflecting on this last year is especially important for you, if this last year was really hard, as you take the time to cry out to God and allow God to work in the spaces of your life that were really hard. So, don't let this time pass you by if this last year was a hard year for you.

Today we're going to be looking at a story in the book of Joshua. Joshua was the leader of the Israelites after Moses. Kids, I'm going to ask you another question. What do you guys know about Moses? (A few kids answer.) Yeah, he left Egypt. That's right! And when he left Egypt, what happened? He had to cross ... (A few kids answer again.) The Red Sea. Thank you! Yes, so Moses was the leader that took the Israelites out of Egypt, took them out of slavery, and when they got to the Red Sea, God miraculously parted it so they could cross the Red Sea into freedom. Then God was going to lead them into the Promised Land, but instead of leading them right away, He had them wander in the desert for 40 years. Moses passes away, Joshua takes over as the leader, and that's where we are right now. The Israelites are about to move into the Promised Land in Joshua 3, starting in verse 14. **"So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant** (Kids, the ark of the covenant is where the Israelites believed God's presence dwelt, so they were carrying the ark of the covenant across the river.) **went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest.** (So, it was really high. The river was flowing.) **Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away,"** (Kids, in the booklets that you got as you walked in, you should see a picture of this. You can be drawing as we're talking this morning.) God does another miracle. The Jordan River parts.

Imagine if Drew Greenway led us down to the Brazos playing his acoustic guitar, and immediately when he stepped in the water, the water just parted. I don't know about you, but I don't want to see what's at the bottom of the Brazos. But it would be a miracle, and we'd be able to cross on dry land. That's what happens here. This is a miracle. And it's not just a miracle, it's

a reminder for the Israelites the same God that led them out of Egypt and across water one time, is the same God that's with them as they move into the Promised Land. It's a reminder for them that the same God is with them.

We're going to skip ahead into Joshua 4, verse 1, and this is what happened when they cross.

“When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, (There were 12 tribes in the nation of Israel.) and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. 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. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

Before we keep going, it's important to remember we are not the Israelites. Right? J.P. is not Joshua. As you read Scripture, we want to be careful we're not reading ourselves into Scripture. But there's always something for us to learn about God and to learn about us and about our lives from Scripture. So, what we see here is after they cross the Jordan River, the people of Israel stopped, and they remembered what God had done. They set up a memorial of stones to what God had done at that time. This is a common practice that we see throughout the Old Testament. I talked about how the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, and after they did that, they stopped, and they sang a song of worship to God. If you read the Old Testament, you see time and time again, when Israel wins a battle they stop and make an altar, and they worship God. That leads me to my first point. Today, we have just two.

1. *The people of God need to remember what God has done.*

We need to remember what God has done. This is so simple, but in practice it can be really hard. When I was in school, I would take a class. I would pay attention in the class, most of the time. I would study for my final, and then I would move on to the next class. I would go from class to class to class.

In sports season, I would practice for that sport, then I would move on to the next sport. So much of my life is thing to thing without reflecting back on what happened, and that's not what my relationship with God needs to be like. That's not what our faith needs to be like. If we aren't intentional, we're prone to make the same mistakes again. We're prone to fall back into the same sin patterns again and again. And that's what we see from the Israelites in the Old Testament. The prophets and the leaders of Israel are constantly reminding the people, “Hey, remember God! Don't forget God! Don't forget what God has done!” They have to say that because they keep forgetting. Over and over and over again, they turn from God back to the false idols that left

them empty the last time. And because they don't remember, they go back to the false idols that keep leaving them empty.

If we're honest with ourselves, we are not that dissimilar. We turn back to the sin patterns in our life; to the lust, to the greed, to the materialism, to the substances that left us empty the last time. The power, the importance, the influence that didn't fill us up last time, we keep going back to because we don't remember. I have friends who are recovering addicts, and they mark the day of their sobriety. They can tell you the month, day, and year; how many days it's been since they've been sober. And they don't just mark that day because they celebrate the freedom that God has given them; they also mark that day, so they don't forget the life that they left behind. How it left them empty; so, they don't go back to those things.

Every time the Israelites saw those stones, it wasn't just a reminder of crossing that Jordan River, though it was. It was also a reminder of what happened before that. How they had to wander the desert for 40 years. How before that, they were in captivity in Egypt. Those stones were a reminder of what God did and what God took them out of.

In our lives, there's lots of places that we mark the end of things, that we mark things being completed. Kids, when you finish a school year, what do you normally do in your class? (Various kids respond.) You have a party! That's right! You celebrate the year. When you finish a sports season, kids, what do you guys do? (Various kids respond.) You have a party! And you get a what? (Kids respond.) A medal or a trophy. We all get trophies! (Audience laughs.) It's a reminder of that amazing season you had with your teammates and your coaches. We're used to doing this in other places in our life, and our faith should be no different.

My question for us this morning is how are we going to mark what God did in this last year? How are we going to remember the things that we need to leave behind? Just this morning, my family and I sat down, and we reflected on this last year: our favorite memories, some of the memory verses that they learned in Kids Ministry, some prayer requests, some things we wanted to be different in this next year. It wasn't this hour-long, amazing, intentional time; but it was good, and it was encouraging. (Speaker waves to someone on his left.) One of my kids wanted to wave to me at that point. For you, it could be something that you write on your mirror so you can see it again. It can be something that you reflect in your journal. Whatever you do, my encouragement to you is that you would share that with the people around you, with your life group, with your family. My second point is this:

2. *We share what God has done to encourage each other.*

Really simple. We share what God has done to encourage each other. In Joshua 4, we saw that Joshua said this, **"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."** It wasn't just for the people who crossed the river, it was for generations to come. As they told the story of what God had done, the ripple effect went on and on and on, because they talked about what God had done. That's how God moves in our lives and other people's lives, when we share what God has done. It's not just impactful to one person; it's impactful to lots of people. When my friends share their stories of sobriety, it encourages me because I see that God

is alive and active in their life. It also challenges me to think about the things in my life that are taking me away from God. How are *you* sharing the stories of what God is doing in your life, what God is teaching you in your life? Who are you confessing to that is going to hold you accountable to the things that you need to leave behind? There's a lot of questions that you can ask as you reflect on this past year and move into the next year, but the request is pretty simple: it's to reflect, mark that down, and then share it with someone. Reflect, mark it down, and share.

In summary, the people of God remember what God has done and we share what God has done to encourage each other.

To close, we talked about how, in the Old Testament, this was a common practice. That they would have rituals and a time of remembrance to remember what God has done. Jesus sets up a time of remembrance for us as well. That time of remembrance is communion, or the Lord's Supper. It's what the Church has done for 2,000 years to remind us of the salvation that we've received through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's also a time for us to assess where we are with God, where we are with each other, and to encourage each other.

I think there's no better way to end than to end this morning with that as we start the new year, to take communion as a family. My friend, Drew, is going to lead us in that communion, but before he does that, I'm going to pray for us. As I pray, I would love for you to think through ... Maybe some of you are like me, and reflecting isn't in your nature, and you need to take time. You need to set aside time to do that soon, so as I pray, think through when is a time I'm going to reflect on this past year, moving into next year? What are the questions we can ask as a family, as we move into this next year? How are we going to make sure to not let this moment pass us by as the calendar turns into 2023? We serve a God who is living and active and is constantly pursuing us to conform us more into the image of Jesus. My prayer for myself, and my prayer for all of us, is that we wouldn't let this time pass us by, that we would surrender more to God in this next year. Let me pray for us that we would.

God, thank you that you're so good. That the same God that was active and faithful and present to Joshua and to Moses and to the early Church, God, that you are present with us. And you love us so much that you don't just leave us in our sins. You don't just leave us in our bad habits, God, but you are constantly conforming us more into who you made us to be. God, I pray for myself, that we would take this time to be intentional, that we would use these seasons that are in our world that are rhythms, God, that we would use these seasons to be thoughtful with where we are with you. God, I'm so grateful for this family that is here this morning, for this church. Help this church to be a light to the world. God, we love you so much! Amen.