

# Looking Back: 2020: Looking Back: 2020

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## Scripture Reference: Joshua #:7-13

Hi, I'm Habby. I'm a member here at Doxa. We're going to be reading scripture together today. If you have one near, please grab your Bible.

We're going to be reading from the book of Joshua chapter 3, verses 7 - 13. Please stand for the reading of God's word. "The Lord said to Joshua, today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of covenant, when you come to the brink of the waters of Jordan, you shall stand still in Jordan. And Joshua said to the people of Israel, come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. 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. Behold, the ark of covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now, therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap." This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Good morning, Doxa. Would you join me in prayer before we start. Father, we come to you this morning eager to hear your voice. Jesus, we thank you for making it possible through your death, to rejoin you as a part of the family of God. And Holy spirit, we ask you this morning that you use your power to make us more like Jesus and draw us closer to him. We give ourselves to you, in Jesus' good name, Amen.

What comes to mind when you think about memorials that you have visited over your lifetime? They're not all that uncommon for us. In fact, sometimes we have our vacation itinerary planned around visiting some of them. Our memorials commemorate terrible tragedies and moments of exceptional valor. Others remind us of unspeakable acts of evil and great victories. Some tell the stories of colossal failures and grand human achievements. We memorialize the wonderful and the awful to encourage and warn those around us and those who will come after us. In a research paper I was reading about a remembrance culture. The author said a remembrance culture is a society or group that keeps the parts of the past in their consciousness and thus deliberately makes it present. That human idea borrows from God's

design for a remembrance culture for his people that memorializes our journey so far in the story of God, so that we're shaped and molded in the way that we think and live in the present. And it maps out for us the path forward for the coming generation. Joshua 4 is a story about one of those chapters in God's story where he's memorializing an event so that it would become a part of their remembrance culture. They are marking moments on their journey where God was both exposing what was in their heart and encouraging them so they would have strength for the journey that was still ahead of each of them. So let me give you some of the history behind this act in Joshua 4 of memorializing this moment in their history.

Four hundred forty years earlier, God had rescued his people by bringing them down to Egypt because of a famine that was in the land. And while they were there, God so blessed and prospered his people that the Pharaoh became paranoid of them and subjected them to slavery, a brutal slavery for almost 400 years. When Israel cried out to God, He heard them and delivered them from Pharaoh's grasp. And he instructed them to leave Egypt and go back to the land that he promised to Abraham. The last hurdle to their freedom was the red sea that was in front of them. And God commanded the sea to open and Israel crossed over on dry land. Then after several weeks of traveling through the wilderness they came right up to the brink, right on the border of the land that God had promised them. And as they looked inside they feared the inhabitants of that land more than they feared God. And so they decided to turn back and God honored their choice and sent them back into the wilderness for the next 40 years.

Joshua 1 represents that same day, only 40 years later. Now they're standing on the brink of the Jordan river but this time they're determined to trust God and to do whatever he's called them to do. And just like at the red sea 40 years earlier, God parted the waters of the Jordan so that they crossed on dry land, reminding them that he is a God of grace and he will not hold their sins against them forever. So God instructs Joshua that after they cross the river they have to stop on the other side and take a moment to mark the meaning of this momentous occasion. This comes... brings us to the beginning of Joshua 4:1 - 6. Let me read God's instructions. "When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, choose 12 men from among the people one from each tribe and tell them to take up 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan...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 12 men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe. And he 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."

Those 12 stones memorialized the history of their journey and the work that God had done to save them over the years. These stones function as kind of an ancient zip file that God wanted them to unpack over and over again so they would continually benefit from the story that it told. Some of those stories would be painful because they exposed the times and the places of personal failure and human limitation on that journey. Other stories would be welcomed with great celebration by them because they provided Israel with encouragement that they needed for their continued journey

in the story of God. The Memorial would remind them that God is at rest, but he's never asleep and is always working for our good and his glory. Both exposure and encouragement are two of God's good and gracious gifts that are necessary for us, for the community of believers that are living with us, and for the up and coming generations who will follow after us. Can you imagine what it would be like if we never learned from our failures and shortcomings but were perpetually stuck in a loop of failure? The greatness of that Groundhog movie was that every time this guy went through the cycle again, he would learn something and change something in the next cycle. Or can you imagine what it might be like to have a kind of a short term spiritual amnesia, where I always forgot God's past acts of protection and provision and presence in life. Remembering both what God exposed about their hearts on the journey and how he encouraged them through his gracious acts of kindness over those 40 years represented two of God's greatest blessings for everyone that wants to make progress toward the high calling we have in Christ. Without those gifts of grace from God, we'll either quickly lose hope and faint on our journey, or we'll end up walking in circles and never make substantial progress toward becoming more like Jesus.

But God has something better in mind for us than just repeating our mistakes. And in addition, he makes clear in Joshua 4 that these gifts are not only for ourselves and our contemporaries, but for our posterity. This is the larger picture of what God accomplishes through our remembrance culture. God tells Israel that one day your grandfather is going to be out in a field in Gilgal with his children having a picnic, and his children will be out there playing in the field and they'll come upon this pile of rocks, and then they'll run back to their dad and say, what is this pile of stones in the middle of the field that don't belong there? God tells Israel in Joshua 4 that when your children ask their fathers in time to come what do these stones mean? Then you shall let your children know Israel passed over the Jordan on dry ground for the Lord dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over as the Lord did to the red sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over. So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty. And that you may fear the Lord, your God forever. You see, God uses this hypothetical, prophetic story about these children to demonstrate that if you and I are willing to engage in the work of looking back, then we will meet moments of great opportunity and weighty responsibility to tell the story of God to the next generation- the story of his never unending faithfulness, even when we're unfaithful, the story of his indomitable power to do whatever he asks, the story of his undying determination to give his people the life he created them to enjoy in the presence of his glory.

So today I want to take a few moments to talk about God's story in terms of our pile of stones that we've gathered through this journey through 2020. Let me start by talking about some of the stones of exposure. It's an understatement, isn't it, to say that 2020 has been a very difficult year for all of us-the staff, your elders, and everybody that calls Doxa church, their home. We were swamped by three tsunami-like events, a plague swept through the whole world and changed everything that we would call normal just a year ago. The murder of George Floyd surfaced questions about how should the local church respond to issues of racism and social injustice. And then for the hat trick, we've been marinating in one of the most divisive political times in American history. It's been a lot. And during those months your pastors and staff have

been working hard at absorbing mountains of information, asking ourselves this question-what would Christ have us to do in these circumstances? And to be sure there have been a diversity of opinions about how we should respond to those events.

So I want to make one thing clear before we go on about our decision making process through this time. We have not made our decisions about how to move forward through these circumstances, either from a fear of viruses or of governments. Instead, we have purposed to walk in the fear of the Lord in our decision-making with an unshakable desire to demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus in the ways we've responded. We have been resolved to live and to lead from that deep conviction as we face the uncertainties that this season has confronted us with. At the same time, we recognize that the ways and frequency of our communications have caused pain and confusion for some of you. And we want to own that failure and say publicly that we're sorry, that we're committed to learning from our mistakes and our shortcomings, and that we covenant with you to grow in the days to come so that we're leading and communicating with clarity and courage and in step with where the Holy Spirit is leading us into the future as a church.

And so, as we take care to walk down that path, we want to ask you for your continued grace toward us as we shepherd the flock here at Doxa through these challenging times. And while there's no manual for these kinds of decisions that we are required to make during times like these, God does promise us that if we're committed to speak the truth in love to each other, to walk humbly before God, to pray for his wisdom and depend on his grace and mercy for us all, that God will guide us, that God will use us and these circumstances to accomplish his will for our lives and for our church. So the elders want to say thank you to the many of you who have stayed with us, especially when you've disagreed in your opinion with a decision that we've made. We want to say thank you to those who have given us gracious feedback about your experience at Doxa church during these months.

And we want to promise you that we will continue to listen to you because that's what good shepherds do-they pay attention to their sheep. And we're determined to believe the very best about you during these turbulent times. And we would ask you to do the same with us. Neither we, the elders nor you, his sheep can be the hero of this kind of story. Only Jesus is sufficient for these kinds of times. Only Jesus can be the hero that will perfectly accomplish all of the Father's will. And so we stand with you in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for his church. Going forward there'll be times when our decision will conflict with your opinion on some matter and not everyone will be happy all the time. But what I can promise you is that as a church and your elders, we will obey the word of God as he reveals it to us. We will continue to make disciples who make disciples. And we will offer the love of God to those who don't yet know him. That is why Doxa church exists and will exist into the future.

Now, I know that many of us feel beat up and discouraged and exhausted from all of these challenges, but remember this, that it was exactly at that same point in the life of Jesus that he surrendered himself to the Father's will to face all of his suffering on our behalf so that you and I might experience God's grace and kindness. So I want to encourage all of you to remember

Jesus in your suffering, so that what flows out of your wounds and bruises in these circumstances reflects what flowed out of his wounds when he suffered on our behalf. Now I'd be remiss and I won't ignore the other stones in the pile-the stones of encouragement. And there are a lot of them. Do you realize even with all the crazy circumstances that have been going on we had the opportunity to baptize three new believers right in the tank over there. We welcomed 18 new babies into our church, and we commissioned four new sets of parents to disciple their children. We installed Brian Martin as our newest elder on the team. And we invited Ken Flower to be one of our elder candidates this year. This is amazing. We added during this year, we added 31 new DNA groups in 2020, 5 new MCs started meeting for the first time and 21 people joined us for a cycle of our journey group ministry. In 2020, we launched a middle school student ministry, and we served over 60 middle and high school students over the year. And in 2020, your generosity overflowed in many ways despite a massive financial downturn in our economy. You invested \$146,000 in church planting across the Puget Sound, the United States, Slovakia and Japan. You partnered with DCYF to give foster kids who were stuck in quarantine over \$2,500 in Boredom Buster gifts. You gave \$5,345 in Christmas gifts and donation to needy families in our community, through the Bellevue Boys and Girls Club. And you donated 520 bags of groceries through our partnership with Jubilee Reach to feed families that are in need during these difficult times.

I could literally go on and on about the stories that I just know about stories of great generosity on the part of many individuals and missional communities. There are far too many to mention this morning, but what I do want to say and remind you of in all of these things is that while God is at rest, he is never asleep and is always working for his good, for our good and his glory. So church on the behalf of the staff and elders, I want to say how very proud of you that we are and how grateful we are for Christ's work through you in the community where we're planted. It's a testimony to your love for him and your willingness to be a blessing to those that are around you.

To close I want to share with you four stories that we've captured about his work through the people of Doxa as we've traveled through the wilderness of 2020. So let's listen and celebrate together.

Aloha Doxa church family. My name is Elliot Twigs. I'm married to my beautiful wife Kelly for the last four years, and we have two amazing boys. We both work as healthcare professionals. Kelly is a critical care nurse, and I work as a family physician. We have been attending Doxa for the past three years and have been truly blessed and we have seen God work in amazing ways. God has shown us this past year that his grace is truly sufficient for us no matter what circumstance we face. A year ago we found out that Kelly was pregnant with our second child. And as we were thrilled to welcome our child, she did have some pregnancy related complications so she needed to be induced sooner. Our church community gathered around us to pray and support us as we welcomed the early arrival of our son. Titus Emmett Twiggs was finally born after a long induction process.

We knew immediately at birth that there was something terribly wrong with Titus' left arm. He was barely moving it and was screaming in pain anytime we did. The doctors told us that he had

a broken arm and likely a nerve injury from childbirth. We were told to expect a long recovery process. While we were full of joy welcoming our son into this world, we were devastated to know that he was in such pain and suffering. I wish I could have taken it all away from him. They told us to expect a long recovery process for him. Kelly and I prayed constantly for God to bring healing and relief to him. And we felt confident that God would provide this. We also reached out to our community who also prayed with us and supported us as well. And we kept crying out to God in our grief and helplessness as we prayed for healing and relief for our son. And we were looking for peace, comfort, encouragement from our heavenly father. When Titus was three weeks old he suddenly started moving his arm and was not in any pain at all. The doctors confirmed he was completely healed. From this day on he has not noticed any pain at all and has had full range of motion. It was a complete miracle. We are so thankful for our MC who was there for us every step of the way from providing meals for us, checking in with us daily, and also praying with us. We have been reminded of God's faithfulness through all of this, and we have experienced that Jesus is everything you could possibly need or hope for even in our pain and struggles.

This year has been an amazing year of seeing the evidence of God's grace in our missional community. In late 2019 my wife and I felt like God was calling us to leave the group that we'd been leading and plant a new group in Lake Hills. God brought us a wonderful group of people during our 301 class. One of my favorite memories from the 301 classes-we set up this huge 12 person tent and then we had our family meal in there together as we started to get to know each other. And who would have known that during the time of COVID just like we did at our 301class, we'd have to learn to be creative about how we gather together. It reminds me of the lengths that the early church would go to gather together. Even in the midst of the chaos of 2020 when I look back over this year and I think of all the things that God was doing, the verse that he brings to mind is Romans 12:15, "rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." Yeah, this year we got to come alongside of three newlywed couples that had to mourn the loss of their ideal wedding, but had to be creative. And we got to come alongside of them as they got married, to pray for unity with the new marriages. And we also had to come alongside of a brother who had to mourn the loss of his marriage during a divorce, and to be able to pray for healing during this season of hardship. We also came alongside of a newlywed couple who we got to pray and rejoice when they got pregnant and come alongside of them and mourn when they lost their baby.

For me it was really awesome to see the growth that my wife went through this past year in helping lead the group. I really got to watch her shepherd-heart develop as she pursued those that sometimes would drift during COVID. And she would just put every effort with all of her heart, soul, and mind to reach out to them. During this season we were developing our missional identity and we reached out with Jubilee each and we helped to pack up groceries for families in need. We also came alongside of Big Table that helps restaurant workers that are struggling. And this Christmas we were able to bring our community group together and provide Christmas gifts for a family in need. We also were able to come alongside of one of my best friends who is a struggling mom, a single mom of three.

And during this time we were able to put lights up on her house, provide Christmas gifts for her family, and also provide monetary relief for piling up bills that she's been struggling with. This was after putting a reach out to the church and the church responded in a really big way. And it was really neat to see the church be a light and to come alongside of a calling and to be able provide for someone in need. God has really been so good in our group this year. We have felt encouraged. We have felt prayed for. We felt loved, and we really feel like we've become family in this past year.

Hi, my name is Mitchell Broderick, and I would like to share with you a little about my 2020 and what I have learned about "not yet". So in April I was actually told that my role was being eliminated but my manager was hopeful that they could find me another position so I was put on furlough. Well four months went by and in July I was actually officially laid off. It's December now and after hundreds and hundreds of applications and countless revisions to the resume, I still have no answer to the question about what I'll be doing for a job. Now I've got to be transparent and say that there are certainly days where I'm frustrated and I asked God, why is this taking so long and why me? And countless times he has patiently answered every single one of those prayers with his peace, his provision, and most importantly his presence. See what I've come to find is that God certainly answers prayer, but hardly ever in the way that I think he should. Maybe you can relate. I'm not really sure why I still think that given he does say in Isaiah 55 that his ways and his thoughts are higher than mine. See, over the years I've prayed for patience and humility and opportunities to trust him more and he answered with 2020. He also did answer with two passages of scripture that have been really a daily reminder of his goodness and his sovereignty. The first is found in Isaiah where he says when you pass through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flames shall not consume you. And I really think that kind of talks to the reality that he says "when" not "if" -when you walk through those things. And the other I found in Jeremiah 17:7 and 8 where he says, but blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him.

They will be like a tree planted by the water, but sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes, its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit. I'm getting to learn a lot about that year of drought. And I will say that every single time that my wife and I have been concerned about our financial situation, he's come through every single time. And he's used this time to grow our relationships with him. He's used it to strengthen our marriage, our health, and even miraculously he's used it to strengthen our financial situation. I ask how? I have no explanation, but God. And even though I don't yet have an answer to my job situation, I have found that I actually have something even better. And I hope you realize that whatever is going on around you, whatever it is that you are waiting for an answer to, God's peace, his provision, and most importantly, his presence is available to you in the "not yet". All he asks of us is that we trust him. Will you?

I started baking because my husband wanted to lose weight and he needed to cut sugar, but both of us love dessert. And we know that I need to get rid of sugar and sweetness from our life. So because of the lock down I had plenty of time to research for healthy recipes. I was

surprised they all actually tasted really good. That's my beginning how I found patience in baking. So I bake every day because without realizing it I feel released from anxiety. You know, I was stuck at home. Every time I turn on TV or connected to social media, what I saw -only tension and division. I don't like seeing anger and hatred among people in our community. I'm longing for good news, but I don't know what to do. I feel I don't have any ability to contribute to community.

What I have is only my Jesus and the joy he has given to me in my kitchen. So I thought I would love to share it. So I reached out to Seattle Foodies group and I offered to bake cakes randomly to stranger. In beginning of my mission I reach out to people of color because I don't know how to support them in the midst of a racial injustice. I just want to show them the love of Jesus and how I care about them. I also reached out to my community group, DNA group, Bible study group, and my husband's coworkers asking if they want a cake. A small text message always end up with a long, nice conversation. So during this pandemic I feel Jesus reached out to me. He never left me alone.

He reconnected me with my old friends who I haven't seen for 40 years. It even sparked the reconnection with my old childhood choir. So we got to sing again for our church hometown 85th birthday. I feel during this pandemic I not only learning baking, but also I got to practice singing again. When it engaged my heart, I feel the joy, the gospel, the presence of God stronger than ever. So it is true when you feel joy, peace and contentment of Jesus, the way you react to anything happening surrounding you will be different.

Every Sunday, we present you with two opportunities to respond to God. The first opportunity is to continue in your generosity to the work that God has called us to here at Doxa. Your continued generosity is a profound expression of God's work in you and through you. If it's your first time to give here at Doxa, they'll be some instructions in the chat that will tell you how and when you can give to the ministry here at the church. And secondly, every week we invite everyone who believes to participate in the Lord's supper together with us. Communion...think of it this way, communion is a pile of stones that call us to remember that establishes a remembrance culture that we stack and restack every Sunday. In communion we invite the Holy spirit to expose our hearts before a holy and compassionate God. And in communion, we find a place of great encouragement for our hearts as we remember the body and blood of Jesus that was given so that we might be cleansed and restored to fellowship with our creator. So we invite all of you who have put your trust in him for the forgiveness of sin, to eat the bread and to drink the juice proclaiming Jesus' death until he returns.

And in the minutes that you have to respond, I want to challenge you personally to enter into a process of creating a remembrance culture for yourself. I'd like each of you at some point during the day to go out in your yard or your flower bed, or some park that's nearby and find two stones-one stone to remind you to take time as the year ends to reflect on what your journey through 2020 has exposed about your heart from the ways you have responded. And let me remind you that because God is gracious and kind and generous with his forgiveness, we can all be honest and courageous in facing whatever the Holy Spirit brings to mind. The other



stone is to remind you to take some time to reflect what you have to celebrate in terms of how God has provided and protected and been present with you during these years. Let me pray over you. Father, we give ourselves to remember who you are, what you've done, who we are to you and what you've called us to do as we continue on our journey in your story. You are our God. We are your people because of Jesus in whose name we pray, Amen.