

Memorial Stones

Joshua 4:1-24

Introduction

There are some things we want to forget. There are some things we desperately want to remember.

Throughout the ages men have built monuments to things that seemed so important at the time. The Pyramids of Egypt are a monument. This year I witnessed the Arch of Titus and the Arch of Constantine in Rome.

Here in Littleton we have a small but precious memorial to the children slain at a local high school. We made a promise to their families that we would never forget.

Have you ever picked up a stone and put it in your pocket? Why did you do that?

In this chapter God directs Joshua and the Tribes to remember how God acted on their behalf in this great miracle.

In chapters 3 we learned that in order to enter the land of promise it would require that they hear a message of faith; understand the walk of faith. But remember there was a big problem. The Jordan River was swollen and could not be crossed. But God in His grace and mercy demonstrated a great miracle. The waters of the Jordan were supernaturally held back and the tribes of Israel were able to cross over. They witnessed the power of God and experienced the power of God. The message of faith led to the walk of faith which led to the Lord leading Joshua to remind the Children of Israel concerning the walk of faith.

Remember this is a book about Victorious Living—Abundant Life—the faith filled life. A life where we experience His presence, His pleasure, His promises and help. This is not a life of simply knowing facts and figures and information. Clearly this life includes knowledge; but it also includes obedience and courage. We are called to a life of faith and action.

W. Graham Scroggie wrote; “There is no victory without struggle; there is no perfection without perseverance. If we would triumph we must try; if we would win we must fight” (see *The Land And Life Of Rest*; p.13-14).

We Christians have something to believe and something to do.

In this chapter we will see two piles of stone; one built by the twelve chosen men on the banks of the river (chapter 3:12; 4:1-8) and one built by Joshua in the midst of the river where the priests and the Ark of the Covenant (4:9-10). These two piles of stone were to serve as memorials to the Children of Israel and bring to the power of God in their journey of faith and occupation of the Land.

A Witness Of Faith (vv.1-9)

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Joshua 4:1-9 (NKJV) 1 And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying:

2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe,

3 and command them, saying, 'Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.' "

The Lord ordered that the memorial be built. Joshua is directed by the Lord to command the 12 previously chosen men (chapter 3:12) to carry 12 stones from the bed of the river on their shoulder to the place of the next night's encampment (Gilgal).

4 Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe;

5 and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel,

6 that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'

7 Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

8 And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the Lord had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

One set of stones would be placed on the west side of the river as a perpetual reminder of the miraculous passage through the river.

We are given permission to remember great acts of faith. They are to serve as reminders of God's grace and power.

9 Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.

Why would anyone put a pile of rocks in the middle of a river that no one can see?

Ah but there's the rub. The Lord sees. The hidden stones would only be seen by God. The stones in the river become a type and a picture of the death and burial of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the visible stones at Gilgal become a type and a picture of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Wiersbe writes; “At the same time, they illustrate the believer’s spiritual union with Christ: when He died, we died with Him; we were buried with Him; we arose with Him in victory! See Eph. 2:1-10; Gal.2:20; Col. 2:13; Rom. 6:4-5. Today the church has two memorials of this great truth: (1) baptism reminds us that the Spirit of God has baptized us into Christ, 1 Cor. 12:13; (2) the Lord’s Supper points us back to His death and ahead to His coming again” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament; p.213*).

Have you been baptized? Did you know that it was in part a witness of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you participating in the Lord’s Supper? Do you bear witness of your faith by sharing the story of your conversion? Is Jesus at work in your life? By faith in Jesus are you experiencing victory over sin? Deliverance from temptation? Does your faith in Jesus translate to new experiences of trust and triumph? Do you encourage others to trust God and place faith in His unchanging love?

Paul the Apostle wrote to the Colossians (3:3); “You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”.

W. Graham Scroggie contrasts the crossing of the Red Sea with the crossing of the Jordan; ‘If the Red Sea passage typifies God’s judgment on sin, the Jordan passage typifies His judgment on self. The Christian is not an old self-renovated, but crucified; one who has had a new self imparted and implanted. Perhaps the last truth which we are willing to believe and act upon, is that our natural self was put to death on the Cross, and must continuously be regarded as in the place of death” (p.20).

I believe Joshua placed the stones in the river as a personal testimony and witness of God’s presence and power. The stones were still there when Joshua wrote this account.

An Example Of Faith (vv.10-14)

10 So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over.

11 Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people.

The ark of the Lord is a type and a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the first to go into the Jordan (3:17) and the last to come out (4:11).

Jesus is the first and the last; the Alpha and the Omega; the beginning of salvation and the end of salvation. Jesus is the leader and the one who brings our salvation to full fruition (Hebrews 12:2).

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12 And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them.

13 About forty thousand prepared for war crossed over before the Lord for battle, to the plains of Jericho.

These are the tribes that received their inheritance on the east side of the river. The combined strength of the two and half tribes appears to be about 100,000 men (see Numbers 26) but only 40,000 cross the Jordan. It would appear that the rest of the men remained to provide protection and security at home.

14 On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.

The servant of Moses becomes his successor. Now was the time of Joshua's elevation. "He who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

A person who truly believes God will obey God! Jesus said if you love me you will keep my commandments. Joshua believed God and obeyed God. At this time in their long history of disobedience—the children of Israel experienced one of those rare moments of obedience. The text stresses their obedience.

In verse 10 we read; ". . .and the people hurried and crossed over;" verse 11; ". . .and the priests crossed over." In verse 12 we read that the tribes "crossed over" in verse 13 the 40,000 prepared for war ". . .crossed over".

Tell me something. Are you an example of faith? To your family? To your children? To the people who know you? Have you crossed over?

The Results Of Faith (vv.15-19)

15 Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying,

16 "Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan."

17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan."

18 And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord had come from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

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What were the results of the people's faith? They spent their first day in the Promised Land! They were standing on the ground of their inheritance! Think of the excitement and joy! Think about what is happening! The Lord orders Joshua to command the priests to come up out of the Jordan (the Ark is the Last To LEAVE). The waters were released when the Priest's feet touched the dry ground (v.18). That's when the results of their faith were realized!

Why does Joshua mention the exact date? They were just five days short of being in the wilderness the full 40 years—since their departure from Egypt. This would give them enough time to prepare for another memorial—the Passover (see Exodus 12:2-3). Abib was the term used by pre-exilic Jews (Babylonian captivity) and Nisan post-exilic Jews (after the return of the captives)—these are the months of March/April.

This is the first month of the sacred Jewish calendar; a new land and a new year! A new beginning!

Think of all the prayers and tears and trials that anticipated that moment! Faith in the Lord bears fruit. If we trust the Lord he will work in our hearts and in our lives! God will honor our faith! But God will not honor unbelief. God made promises to Israel. And God has made promises to you in Christ. There are conditions; trust—believe—cross over!

And when you do make sure you take the cross with you!

The Purpose Of Faith (vv.20-24)

20And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.

One of the purposes' of faith is to pass it on! We do this so our children will come to know the Lord and to love the Lord! Once Joshua sets up the stones in Gilgal he calls for a memorial service of thanksgiving and praise! He challenges the people to be a witness to their children and to all future generations and even the world.

This is the first encampment. Gilgal is about 2 miles from Jericho. We are not told if the 12 stones were placed in a pile or in a circle. But the word *Gilgal* means circle. It would seem that the purpose of placing the stones was to serve as a reminder for generations to come how the Lord brought them through the Jordan just like the Lord had taken the previous generation through the Red Sea.

21Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?'

Joshua anticipated a future. A future where children ask questions!

22then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land';

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23for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over; 24that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.”

The stones were to serve as a sign for all to see! A visible reminder of God’s faithfulness and power! The stones were not restricted to the tribes of Israel but also included “all the peoples of the earth”!

Parents are tasked with the job of teaching their children (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Alexander Maclaren wrote;

“The Jewish father was not to send his child to some Levite or other to get his question answered, but was to answer it himself. I am afraid that a good many English parents, who call themselves Christians, are too apt to say, “Ask your Sunday School teacher,” when such questions are put to them. The decay of parental religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian households; and the happiest results would follow if Joshua’s homely advice were attended to, “Ye shall let your children know” (*Expositions of Holy Scripture III, p. 122*).

We are to teach our children and our grandchildren about the power and faithfulness of God. Look at the text; (v.24) “that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, and that you may fear the Lord your God forever.” What kind of God is God?

We live in a culture that is doing everything it can to distance itself from the Bible’s revelation about creation, the fall, redemption and the ultimate restoration of all things.

It is the first night in the land of promise. It makes perfect sense that the tribes should reflect on the on the power and greatness and majesty of their great God. Can you imagine as they stared at either the pile or circle of stones that had just freshly been removed from the river Jordan?

They were reminded that God had done something great, something marvelous, something miraculous that day!

Is it possible that their hearts experienced some fear—some apprehension of the uncertain future? But based on what happened that day—surely they could trust God for the days ahead.

Surely based on what Jesus has done for you on Calvary’s cross, his empty tomb and ascension into heaven you can trust Jesus for the days ahead. What reminders have you set up in your heart and in your home that you can trust God’s grace, His power, His faithfulness?

Conclusion

Joshua teaches that one of the purposes of faith is to remind people of the power of God.

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Another purpose is to teach our children and all the peoples of the earth.

The whole Bible for the whole world. What does it mean that the hand of the Lord is mighty and to fear the Lord?

It incorporates all that the Bible says about the attributes of our Great God; He is Holy, and Just, Pure and Righteous, He alone is the self-existent everlasting God. He alone is the Creator and sustainer of the Universe; He alone possesses all power, he alone has the power to stay the flowing rivers—and cause the rivers to flow. He alone has the power to literally break the Ocean floors and remove mountains and cause the the lakes to fill or remain dry forever.

We are to teach and preach both the fear of God and the power of God.

Do you recall the words of Jesus? “All power is given to me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all the nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—
to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (ROM. 16:25-27).

Be a witness to your faith.

Be an example of your faith.

Be obedient in your faith.

Be prepared to pass on your faith.