

A monument to what God has done for us

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if you've known me for any length of time, you'll know that my memory leaves much to be desired. And I'm openly admitting this so that if I happen to miss an appointment with you, you can't say I didn't warn you.
- All right? Although appointments are important. And so I have a system to aid my memory to keep appointments. I have a phone and a smartphone.
- And it does all the work for me. Whenever I make an appointment, I put it in the calendar. And then I set a reminder. So it beeps sort of half an hour before my appointment. So I remember. So I don't have to rely on my own mind, which is much like a sponge.
- No, not like a sponge. More like Swiss cheese, full of holes. Maybe you're the same. But I don't think it's just me. I think we all have systems, don't we, to remember important appointments, like doctor's appointments or birthdays or anniversaries.
- Maybe you've got a calendar. And husbands talking about anniversaries. If there's one reason to have a calendar, it's to remember your anniversary. That's a hint free of charge. A little bit of advice.
- [1 : 1 1] But now, if you think about it. So we make all this effort to remember things. To remember important things. But just as much, we need to remember things that have passed as much as we want to remember things that have come.
- And we all do that as well. We keep photo albums. We maybe keep diaries or scrapbooks or letters or gifts that we received and that have sentimental value. You know what I'm talking about? Things that help us to look back on the past.
- That help us to remember what's gone so we don't forget the important times of life. I'm sure you've got things like that. So that maybe we can show our children and their grandchildren these memorials of our life.
- So that they know where they've come from. So they've got a bit of history. So we all have these memorials. Ways to remember things that have passed just as much as we want to remember things to come.
- Now, why am I talking about this? Well, you see in the book of Joshua, there's something very interesting. As you read through the book of Joshua, which I encourage you to do in your own time as we're working through it on Sundays. And as we read through these incredible events of Israel entering the land that God has promised them.
- [2 : 1 8] At key points in the story, and seven times throughout the book, in fact, God's people establish a special memorial, a way of remembering what has happened in future generations. When something important happens, they remember it and they make a way of remembering it.
- They have a system. Now, of course, they didn't have phone cameras and Instagram. So they typically used a pile of stones, which was just the best way. A pile of stones that they could see that was built. And whenever they walked past it in the future, they would remember what happened there.

And that was the purpose of this pile of stones. Not just so that they would remember it, but that they would be able to pass on to their children what had happened and the importance of it.

Because of these incredible events that are happening in Joshua, they didn't want to forget them in the coming generations. And we find the first of these piles of stones, these memorials, in the story of Israel crossing the Jordan River here in chapters three to four.

And as we go through it, I want us to learn why it's so important for Israel. And not just for Israel, but for us as well to remember and to make sure that we have ways of remembering what God has done in the past.

[3 : 27] And so let's see what happens. We pick up where we left off last week. The Israelites are camped on the east of the Jordan. You'll remember. They've already spied out. They've done a reconnaissance mission for the land ahead of them.

And now they're preparing for the big move across the border, which is the Jordan River, into enemy territory. Now, the closest ford to where they're camping, a ford is an area that's shallow enough for them to cross, was 30 kilometers north near the town of Adam.

And that's where people, the enemy, would have expected them to make their crossing. But when we read on, we read that's not where they go. Instead, Joshua leads them to a place in the riverbank much closer to their encampment, but literally uncrossable, especially considering that the river was in flood at this time of year, we're told later in the passage.

And I'm sure many of the Israelites, as they stood on that riverbank, were wondering just what they're doing here. You know, standing, looking at the wild river, going, surely Joshua doesn't expect us to swim across.

I mean, we'll never make it with our baggage and with our armor. I mean, that's crazy. Did he make a mistake, do you think? Navigational error? But we're going to see that this is no mistake. Joshua made no mistake leading them here, because in verse 5, he explains the reason for them being here.

[4 : 44] Have a look what he says. Joshua told the people, consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you. Joshua said to the priests, take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.

So they took it and went ahead of them. Now, the ark of the covenant, as you probably know, it was this big golden box containing God's law, amongst other things.

And in the Old Testament, it literally acted as God's presence with his people. And it was this ark that was vital to what was going to happen next. And, of course, Joshua and I had the people's attention, because when the ark was involved, something was going to happen.

They knew. And so I want you to imagine the scene. Okay, just take yourself there. You're standing on the bank with the people of Israel, waiting expectantly. And then you see it coming. Slowly, the priests coming through the crowd, walking under the weight of the ark, carrying it to the river's edge slowly.

Nobody speaking. All you hear is the turbulent rushing of the Jordan's waters. And then the priests move forward. Their toes touch the edge of the river.

[5 : 50] And then, well, let me read the account. Now, just for a second, imagine that you're there, and you watch this happening.

And you don't expect this to happen at all. The water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan.

While the water flowing down to the Sea of Arab, the Dead Sea, was completely cut off. And so the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all of Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

Now, just imagine being there. This is a historic event. This is a miraculous event. It couldn't have been mistaken for a natural occurrence. I don't know when last you've been to a river, but it doesn't just suddenly stop flowing, and the water pile up in one place.

You can't explain this away. And I've read, you know, when I was reading commentaries, some people try to explain it away, saying, oh, earthquake or a rift in the valley, blah, blah, blah. But you can't explain this away.

[7 : 05] And that is really the whole point of a miracle, right? The point of a miracle is that God wants our attention. He doesn't want us to try to explain it away. God is deliberately intervening in the natural order, which, of course, he can do.

Because, as we sang earlier, he is the Lord of all. He made the natural order. He can intervene in it. And that's what he does to make a point, to get our attention, to teach us something.

And that's what he was doing here. This miracle is meant to teach the Israelites something. Namely, that as they entered into this new land, God was with them.

And God was working on their behalf to do things that they couldn't do for themselves. That was the whole point. They could have gone 30 kilometers north and fought at the river. Fine. But God wanted them to cross at this place that was uncrossable, to make the point that he can do for them what they can't do for themselves.

That is the big lesson of this event. Now, later on, we read in chapter 4 that this miracle is compared with the miracle very similar of God parting the Red Sea.

[8 : 09] Remember we read in Exodus 40 years earlier. It's very similar, but there's a difference. The difference is where God parted the Red Sea to rescue people out of a slavery that they couldn't escape themselves.

Now he is parting the Jordan to bring them into a new life that they couldn't attain for themselves. And so it's the other bookend of God's great act of redemption of rescuing his people.

And it's no mistake that he again parts waters to let his people through. In both cases, they needed God to go ahead of them to do what they couldn't do. Do you see the point?

Do you see what these people needed to learn? And what we need to learn as well about God? And that's what this miracle is meant to teach. But that's not the only reason God did it.

The other reason we see in verse 7. Have a look. And the Lord said to Joshua, Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so that they may know I am with you as I was with Moses.

[9 : 13] And so besides showing the Israelites that he is working on their behalf, which was a great thing they needed to know, he also wants the Israelites to know that he is with their leader Joshua.

He wants to highlight Joshua to them. He wants them to recognize that he is the man God has given to lead them into their new life. And so they need to listen to him. They need to recognize who Joshua is.

And they need to follow and obey Joshua. You see, that is another reason God did this miracle. So that they take Joshua seriously. That they take his words seriously. Which is, of course, what happened.

Because in chapter 4, verse 14, we read, That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life.

It's interesting, isn't it? They stand in awe of Joshua because of what God has done. But God wanted them to see Joshua as their leader. Because God was working through him to bring them into the promised land.

[10 : 14] And so that's the purpose of this miracle. To show people, firstly, that God was intervening for them to do something that they couldn't do. And secondly, to make sure that they listened to their leader, Joshua.

But now, what does this all mean for us today? If we understand that's what is going on then, what does it mean for us today sitting here in the 21st century? Well, you see, the last two Sundays, we've come to understand, reading through Joshua 1 and 2, we've come to understand that Israel entering the land under Joshua all those years ago is in many ways a foreshadow of God's people today entering into their inheritance, into a new life, into eternal life, in a new world one day.

And so, as we read this, the same principles of them entering their promised land apply to us entering into ours.

And so in this story, we learn something very important for us, you see. And it's this. Just as God then sent his people a leader to take them to their promised land, he sent us a leader, Jesus, to take us to ours.

And just as God confirmed that this is the man to follow through this powerful miracle with Joshua, he has confirmed his presence with the person of Jesus Christ, in the person of Jesus Christ, as the person of Jesus Christ, with all the miracles that happened when Jesus was on earth, not least of all, his historical resurrection from the dead.

[11 : 47] So you see the similarity, just as God confirmed with power and signs this leader, Joshua, he has confirmed with power and signs today's leader, Jesus.

These miracles happened in our world. Jesus' miracles, all of his healings, all of his raising people from the dead, all of his amazing miracles, also showing the power of God in him, calming a storm at sea, these kind of things, amazing things.

And then, of course, as I said, his resurrection. And all of these things happened to make sure that we too, like Israel did for Joshua, we too listen to Jesus and obey him every day. And just as foolish as an Israelite would have been to say, well, I don't know about this Joshua guy, you know.

Yes, yeah, God stopped the river to prove that Joshua is the man to follow, but, you know, I'd still rather find my own way to the promised land. Now, that would be foolish. But just as foolish as that is someone today saying, yes, this Jesus guy, he's done amazing things, I can't deny that, it's recorded in history, but I'm not going to listen to him.

I'd rather find my own way into eternal life. Now, that's craziness. Because, you see, God has confirmed that Jesus is the man to follow, that he is the one who can lead you to life.

[13 : 05] He's the only one who can lead you to life. So don't ignore him. Listen to him and follow where he takes you. Take him seriously as the Israelites took Joshua seriously from this day forward.

And that's the first thing that we learn from this miracle. But there's another thing that we learn from this. And this, you know, as I was preparing this sermon, this is something that encouraged me so deeply.

And that is that just as God did something for his people that they couldn't do for themselves back then, you know, both to rescue them out of slavery through the Red Sea and then to bring them into the promised land through Jordan, miraculously.

So, he has done something for us today which we could never do for ourselves. He rescued us from sin, from the slavery of sin that still has so many people in this world under its power.

God miraculously rescued us when Jesus died on the cross in the place of sinners to offer us a righteousness that is not our own, a standing before God that is totally not our doing, something we could never attain ourselves.

[14 : 14] God provided in Jesus for us. And we need to get this. We need to understand that there is no way that you or I could do anything to make God love us more.

And if you trust in Jesus, there is nothing you can do to make him love you any less. Nothing at all. Because our salvation, you see, our entry into God's kingdom and our entry into the promise, our entry into eternal life is totally God's work, not ours, just like it was for Israel.

And just as they had to cross the river, trusting in God to hold back the waters, imagine what it would have been like. You see a few miles upriver, you see these waters piled up and you have to cross the river with your baggage and your armor and you just hope that it's not going to break its banks and come rushing over you.

You have to trust God. It's a big step of trust across this river. And just as they had to trust God and not trust themselves as they crossed into the promised land, we need to trust God as we cross into eternal life.

We need to trust in the righteousness of Jesus alone to get us there, not trying to ford the river by ourselves, not trying to earn our way into heaven, not trying to think that doing something is going to get us there, but trusting God alone to take us there.

[15 : 34] And that is how we find freedom and confidence to live the life that God has called us to without the worry of whether I have to do more, without the worry of, oh, you know, am I missing it?

Am I not quite there yet? You know, and there's so many ways that we can doubt and we can tell ourselves, no, well, you know, I'm not as good a Christian as I should be.

Maybe I haven't made it yet. No, it's not about you fording the river by yourself. It's not about you trying to get there by yourself. God has done it for you. All you've got to do is step out and trust and trust him and find the freedom of knowing that he's already done it all because he is with you and he is working on your behalf.

And let me ask you, is that how you live? Have you experienced that freedom of knowing that it's all done already? the freedom of God's grace and the assurance that he loves you consistently and there's no way you can mess that up?

Have you tasted that amazing freedom of knowing God's love for you and that your eternal life is already secure and nothing can change that, no matter what you do?

[16 : 47] You see, Jesus came to give you that freedom. Today, if only you would come to him in faith, you can have it. It's free. That's what freedom means.

You don't have to do anything. And you see, those are the things that we're reminded of as we watch Israel cross the Jordan, when they trusted in God and as they got to the other side of the bank.

Imagine how they were feeling. Imagine how you would have been feeling. You've now crossed this uncrossable river. You've seen an amazing act by this powerful God who you know is with you and working on your behalf.

Imagine the excitement and the anticipation of what's ahead and now they're in the promised land. Well, that's the excitement and anticipation we can have of eternity, knowing that God is working on our behalf to get us there.

If only we step out, cross the river, trust in him. And those are the things that we learn. And I could stop there and we could go to tea. But there's one more thing we need to see in this passage.

[17 : 51] One thing that is vitally important is that we don't forget these truths, that we have memorials to remember all these amazing things that God has done for us.

You see, in a way, the most important part of the story is what happens after the miracle, not the miracle itself. We see in chapter 4, verse 2, when the whole nation of Israel 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.

Very weird request. I mean, why? Well, we read the reason why in chapter 4, verse 20 at the end. Joshua set up at Gilgal the 12 stones that they had taken out of the Jordan.

He said to the Israelites, In other words, you see, God, this is vitally important, God didn't want to teach the people that he was with them and working on their behalf without them remembering it as they carried on.

And so he established the sign, this memorial that would help them and their children and their children's children to remember. Because after all, you know, what's the point of a miracle if the people that he did it for forget what happened a few years later?

[19 : 33] And so it was important that they remember. And it's so important for us, too, to have memorials of God's work, what he's done for us, because we can so easily forget.

You know, and those are the times in life that we struggle. When we forget that God loves us, we struggle and we don't have the confidence and we feel despondent. When we forget that God's in control, when we forget that he's the powerful God that has done everything for us, then we struggle and we start to feel guilt and we start to feel doubts.

And because we forget, we so easily forget, our minds are like sieves when it comes to the things that God has done. And what happens when we forget?

Well, turn with me in your Bibles to the next book in the Bible, Judges. Let's have a look at what happens when people forget what God has done for them.

Judges, chapter 2, from verse 10. This is years later after the events of Joshua.

[20 : 41] Look at what it says from verse 10 of chapter 2. After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals, they forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors who had brought them out of Egypt. And that was the start of Israel's downfall, Israel's ruin.

Isn't that so sad? All of these amazing things that God has done. Imagine you were there and how exciting and amazing it would have been to see all this. And the very next generation, they had all forgotten.

They had all forgotten what God has done. And you know what happened then? Well, they drifted away from him. They forgot him. They served other gods. They fell into sin. And in the same way, this is the warning of this passage for us this morning.

If we don't make sure constantly to remember who God is and what he's done for us, we can also just as easily drift away from him and go back into self-reliance and grow cold towards him and chase after other things.

[21 : 45] It's very easy to do that. It's like a marriage. Those of you who are married, you know, it's been said, this is a quote, Isn't that so true?

You know, maybe you don't commit adultery or leave your spouse, but 10 years pass, 20 years pass, and you look at them and you just realize that you've lost what you once had.

Married couples, you can avoid that. With God's help, you can avoid that. Don't forget the preciousness of your spouse. Remember what it is that you love about them. Because it's so easy to forget.

It's so easy to drift apart without realizing it. If you don't take time to appreciate them, if you don't go on date nights, if you don't spend time together, if you don't put off the phone and put off the TV and just spend time with each other, remembering what you love about the person.

Make sure you do that. Married couples. But in the same way for all of us, married or unmarried, it is so easy to lose sight of the preciousness of God. So easy. And the awesomeness of salvation.

[22 : 58] The awesomeness of what God has done for us and where we're going and what it means for us. It's so easy to become blasé about that. And just, you know, come to church and sing these songs and go, Yeah.

I mean, we need to be bowled over by what God has done. And when we read the stories of Israel crossing this Jordan miraculously, which was such an amazing story, that's just a foreshadow of what God has done for us to bring us home, to bring us into eternity.

It's amazing. We mustn't lose sight of that. We mustn't let our love of God grow cold. We mustn't let our worship of Him just become dead and formal.

I mean, do you fear maybe that's what's happening to you? Maybe you've been a Christian for years, but slowly you've been losing your passion.

Maybe you don't feel the love for God anymore that you once did. When you worship at church, you find yourself just mouthing the words because it's expected, but your heart's not really in it.

[24 : 05] Or maybe your heart's never really been in it, and you're only realizing that now. Well, you need to look back. You need to remember. You need to look at the memorials.

You need to dust off your Bible and remember all that God has done. As you read through, especially the Gospels, as you remember what Jesus did for you to save you. Or maybe you read through that and you discover it for the first time and what it means for you.

And you, for the first time, find the freedom of grace and the salvation and the sure hope of eternal life. But when you have that, and if you have it this morning, you need to remember it.

You need to look forward to church every Sunday as a chance to reignite your love for God. Don't say, well, I've been a Christian for years. I know it all already. Don't think that you don't need a reminder of God's grace every single day.

Because you do. And the church, you know, when we meet for church, church is full of opportunities to remember God and what He's done and get you loving Him again as we sing songs of His salvation and His grace, as we share in communion, as we open His Word.

[25 : 17] Don't neglect those opportunities. Don't waste those songs. We sing four to five songs every Sunday. Don't waste any of them. Use them as opportunities to reignite your love for God.

Because it's so easy to forget. It's so easy to drift away from grace. And so we need to regularly remember God and the great things He's done to save us from sins.

We need to remind each other. We need to meet together. We need to spur each other on by reminding each other of the gospel of grace. But then there's something even more vital we need to do.

What? What could be more vital than that? Well, we need to tell what God has done to the next generation. Verse 6.

In the future, when your children ask you, what do these stones mean? Tell them. Verse 21. God said to the Israelites, in the future, when your descendants ask their parents, what do these stones mean?

[26 : 16] Tell them. God, you see, wants to make sure it is on God's heart to make sure that each generation passes down the knowledge of Him to the next generation.

God's way of preserving the gospel and the great things that He has done is through the family. In Deuteronomy 4.9, He says, Be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them. And there is a word for grandparents as well. If you're a grandparent, Deuteronomy 4.9, teach them to your children and your children's children just in case your children don't do the job.

It's so important today, especially as our children are bombarded with thousands of ideas on TV, on the internet, through their friends, through games, through everything, all these ideas and philosophies and untruths.

It's vital that we pass on the precious truth of God and what He's done to the next generation. So vital. So parents, we need to do that at home in regular Bible time with our kids.

[27 : 26] We need to help them to grasp the gospel of salvation, not just tell them Bible stories, but help them in each of those stories to see the gospel, to point to the gospel, to realize what God has done for them.

But even if you're not a parent, you might be thinking, well, I'm not a parent. This doesn't apply to me. Well, it does. Because we are in a family as a church and you can pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation through involvement in Sunday school, involvement in children's ministry.

We need Sunday school helpers, desperately. We need kids club helpers. We need holiday party volunteers. All of these programs that we run for children in order to pass on the gospel of grace so that the world doesn't forget when we're not here anymore, when we have died and passed on, that this gospel is still shining brightly in Plumstead.

Will it be in the next generation? Will we have passed it on? Well, you know what? We can only do that. We've got to remember this. We can only be a messenger of grace to the next generation if we first remind ourselves of it daily, if we first dwell in that gospel, if we absorb ourselves in that gospel of grace and delight in it and regularly stand in awe of God and all He's done for us, we need to do that and get excited about it so that we can pass it on.

So let's ask for God's help that that would be true of us this morning. Heavenly Father, we thank you not just for the amazing gospel of grace, of free salvation, of the knowledge that through Jesus you love us endlessly and there's nothing we can do to mess that up.

[29 : 11] Thank you for that great message but thank you also for these stories in the Bible that point towards it and that color it in and that help us to see just what it means.

Just as these Israelites did something which they could never do for themselves because you did it for them so you've done something for us. Help us to remember that.

Help us to be excited about it. Help us never to drift away from the awe of the gospel of grace and Lord, help us and strengthen us to pass that on especially to the next generation so that our children know and are excited about the gospel because they see us excited about it.

Lord, help us by your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen.