

Joshua 4

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture text is Joshua 4. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, and command them, saying, Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priest's feet stood firmly.

And bring them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you lodged tonight. Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe.

And Joshua said to them, Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you.

When your children ask, in time to come, what do these stones mean to you? Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever. And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the Lord told Joshua.

[1 : 33] And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood, and they are there to this day.

For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan, until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.

The people passed over in haste, and when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the Lord and the priests passed over before the people. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. About forty thousand ready for war passed over before the Lord for battle to the plains of Jericho. On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him, just as they had stood in awe of Moses all the days of his life.

And the Lord said to Joshua, Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan. So Joshua commanded the priests, Come up out of the Jordan.

[2 : 49] And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

And he said to the people of Israel, When your children ask their fathers in times to come, what do those stones mean? Then you shall let your children know, Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.

For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God 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. This is the word of the Lord.

[3 : 56] Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Oh, good morning.

It is always a joy to be together on Sunday mornings. Praise the Lord for each one of you. And I'm praying that the Lord would be gracious and kind and merciful to you all summer long. And that week by week, we would hear God's word for us and find our lives more conformed to his liking. I suppose I could title and would title this sermon, The Story of the Stones and the Song We Are to Sing.

The Story of the Stones and the Song We Are to Sing. Let me give you a spoiler alert. You know what those are.

You're hinting at wanting to look at something down the road, but an indication comes onto your screen. If you read this, you're going to know what happened.

[5 : 12] Spoiler alert. Well, the narrator has already given you the spoiler alert on the songs that we sing concerning the stones that we read of.

It's right there in verse 23 and 24. If you don't want to know where the sermon's going, don't listen for just a moment. But here it is. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that, the story of the stones, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever.

That's where we're going. That's the relationship of the story of the stones to the song we're to sing. Something in the story will help us know something about God, namely that he's mighty.

And notice he will exercise his might in the story by saving his people. We normally think of people who are mighty as putting down all other things, but in this story, a mighty God who saves.

And not only something we know then about God by the time we have our ice cream afterwards, but then a life we are to live collectively and individually before God.

[6 : 48] One of joyful reverence and fear. That's where we're headed. It only remains to see how the storyteller gets us there.

Look again at the first eight verses. It's really where the story of the stones commences. And what we see in verses two and three is that from Israel, the Lord wanted a memorial set up.

He saved them. He settled them. And he now wants a memorial set up by them.

Verse two, take 12 men from the people from each tribe and command them saying, take 12 stones from here out of the midst of the stones, the Jordan from the place where the priest foot stood firmly and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.

A memorial set up. 12 stones. Picked up by 12 men. Each one acting as a representative on behalf of all the men and women and children.

[8 : 09] They were to be taken from the riverbed. Itself. And placed on the river bank. The day began with the people on the east side of the Jordan.

As it closes, they are on the west side of the Jordan. And what God wants to commemorate his work of salvation is a visible memorial under his mighty act.

We can envision the scene. Masses of people in motion across this river bed.

Thousands upon thousands. 10,000 upon 10,000. The priest yet standing in the middle on dry ground. The soles of their feet, as you recall, hit the water on the front side and the waters pulled back and they are now planted in the middle with men and women and children streaming past them hastily from one side to the other.

12 men are now told either to enter back into the river or to get it on their way over. Take 12 stones.

[9 : 31] Here we now see them mingling around the feet of the priests, motionless though they are. And the men dislodging from the bank, the bed, stones, hoisting them and mustering them on their shoulder and bringing them across.

Can you see it? I can imagine had I been selected to be a stone carrier wanting to make sure I chose a good one.

When my son Baxter was in kindergarten, his teacher, Miss Snyder, took them on a yellow school bus to a farm.

And this particular farm had pumpkins. And every five-year-old exiting the school bus was told you could bring one pumpkin home.

And so the children were out in the patch looking for pumpkins and leave it to Baxter to say, I'm going to bring back the biggest one possible.

[10 : 42] And he, at the age of five, got a pumpkin larger than life. The other kids were carrying small ones and tucking them under one hand like table gourds.

And here's Baxter, the teacher tells us later, having taken off his sweatshirt now because he couldn't carry it. And laying his sweatshirt on the ground, rolling the big pumpkin on top of it, grabbing hold of a sleeve and dragging that pumpkin all the way back to the edge and home. And I suppose someone on that day might have felt that way. Can't you see him now grabbing the largest stone he can carry? And when they arrive on the other side, they're rolled off their shoulder and piled on one another.

And there are now four, perhaps, and three and more and a rough-hewn memorial there before the people. Why this memorial?

What are the purposes that stand behind the story of stones? Let me give you three.

[12:04] The memorial was set up for the purpose of passing down from one generation to another the saving acts of God.

That's the first thing there, isn't it? Notice in verse 6 and following, That this may be a sign among you when your children ask in the time to come, what do the stones mean to you?

Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord when it passed over the Jordan. The waters of the Jordan were cut off.

So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever. This word on a memorial is, in a sense, carries the perspective of concentrated memory.

The stones were there for Israel for the purpose of a generational handing down of what God had done previously.

[13:13] The stones, then, were not only to serve as an aid to Israel, but to their children.

Think of it. On this day, with hundreds of thousands of people crossing this, there were only two individuals who had actually crossed the Red Sea, Joshua and Caleb. Only those two had seen the previous generation's mighty acts of God, but that entire generation was now gone.

And in this generation, there would be a visible reminder for those who yet are unborn. A family vacation to the riverbank would provide later generations the opportunity to retell the old, old story. I bet they love to tell the story. If you had seen it or been there, you would have thought this will be your theme in glory. To simply tell that old, old story of God's settling us at home.

Well, we'll come back to this generational moment later in the text for he will bring this very charge of verse 6, not only to the 12 who were going in, but he will, at the end, speak these words again to all the people who have now gone out.

[15:08] But there's another purpose for the memorial in the story of the stones. It's not simply for the purpose of passing down. It's also setting up the memorial for the purpose of remembering.

You can see it right there, verse 7. This memorial, this act of remembrance.

Big rocks for forgetful minds. That's the purpose. Evidently, from God's perspective, because he commands of his people.

From God's perspective, as he looks down from heaven and performs his mighty acts of salvation in the back of his mind. No, in the forefront of his mind is it will not be long before they forget.

To get Israel over was one thing. To get Israel to remember, well, that's quite something else.

[16:24] Now, let me just pause on that for a moment. Are we not like Israel in this respect? The sad truth is this. When it comes to God helping us, we are a forgetful people.

We are like men and women who actually look into a mirror. And then leaving it, don't know what we look like. It can happen from one day to the next.

I remember, by way of illustration, a moment in the building of this, a restoration of this. We had seen God answer in the most extraordinary of ways.

With a financial gift that came from nowhere. At a moment when we wondered whether it would all happen.

And then the next day came. And guess what? We didn't have glue for the carpet. Remember that, Josh?

[17:39] We had received a gift from the hand of the Lord to further massive work in the place.

And we yet needed our daily bread of five-gallon drums of glue that they couldn't find anywhere in the Midwest.

And we were preparing and praying that you would enjoy a Christmas Eve service on carpet in the commons that actually was laid down.

And God miraculously, by the day's end, answered it. I don't know where it came from or what state it came from, but I don't know who went to get it.

I don't know how it got here. But it reminded me how soon I forget. He did the big thing, but he required me to trust him on today's thing.

[18:37] How about you? See, this is the dilemma of a forgetful people. He saves us, and then our minds fail us.

His mercies are there, but then we melt. Which is why you have to remember.

We all need visible reminders to help us remember, because God's faithfulness is quickly forgotten.

His mercies run up against our short-term memory.

The memorial is set up for the purpose of passing down. The memorial is set up for the purpose of remembering. And the memorial was also set up to mark the precise spot of God's deliverance.

Take a look again at verses 9 and 10. This was interesting to me. A detail in the text that had not yet been known by us as readers. And Joshua set up 12 stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant had stood.

[19:53] And they, that is the ones in the midst of the Jordan, are there to this day. Evidently, the 12 stones that were carried over by 12 men, representing all of the people that are now visible on the western edge of the riverbank, are multiplied by 12 other stones that are in the middle at the feet of where the priests were, so that the very spot of his deliverance, the very means by which they came through by the Ark of the Covenant, would be commemorated forever.

As though God was saying, though the waters will rush over the place of my mercy, it is marked here, this spot.

I have done something on behalf of my people. It's stunning, these very truths. It's 12 stones, twice over.

24 symbols, then, of their salvation. What's fascinating to me next in the story of the stones is that he goes on with intricate details concerning the people going over and the effect on Joshua and the work of the priests and the day in which it happened.

All of this material in verses 11 to 22. One would think that the story of the stones is complete. But evidently, something is here by way of emphasis.

[21:39] I put these things in my mind as important details that are in the terrain of the text. What is he wanting to emphasize in verses 11 to 22?

Well, it would seem to me first, he wants you to know that everyone participated and everyone came into God's promised place. The people, verse 10, passed over in haste.

And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the Lord and the priest passed over. But notice, it's the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh that passed over.

Armed. He wants you to know that when God did the act of salvation, even those who had already had a settled place nonetheless entered in with.

And interestingly, and if we have time, we'll look at it later, they came in armed for battle. An indication that whatever God was doing with Israel at this moment in time, it was in some measure yet incomplete.

[22:50] Having gone out of Egypt through the Red Sea and the Moses, and having come into the kingdom land under Joshua, the people were nevertheless having to move forward in battle array.

An indication that whatever's happening in this chapter is yet looking for a greater climax yet to come. But the people. Notice again, though, even more than that.

Verse 14. On that day, the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all of Israel. This important detail in the terrain of the text. And notice how he speaks of the exaltation of Joshua.

Just as they had stood in awe of Moses. Don't miss that. There is a movement in the storytelling that repetitively brings to mind what's happening through Joshua and the Jordan is connected in the mind of the storyteller with what happened to Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea.

It is as though the writer of the story would have you know and believe that what happened on this day was as significant as what happened under Moses when they were led out of Egypt.

[24:08] It's there elsewhere. Let me just show it to you. This exaltation of Joshua in ways that connect him to Moses and to the Exodus event.

Look at verse 19. The people came up out of the Jordan on the 10th day of the first month. Now, that is a strange detail to add in the story. Why does one need to know this?

Other than it commemorates the very day of Passover. When God asked his people to offer the lamb because he was bringing them out.

And now God, all of these years later, commemorates the same day of their salvation from Egypt to the same day as their settledness in the kingdom land.

And that's not the only connection again to Exodus. Look again at verse 21. And he said to the people of Israel, when your children ask their fathers, what do these mean? Then you tell your children.

[25 : 08] This is an echo of the Passover meal itself. When your children ask you, why do we do this? Why are we commemorating this? The writer is wanting you to know this event is as important as getting out of Egypt.

It's the most important thing that's happened in the whole story until now. And then again, one more time in verse 23. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over.

Notice the detail of the text. As the Lord your God did to the Red Sea. The storyteller is wanting the listener then to know this.

At the time of the Exodus, God saved his people. And the passing through the Red Sea was their going out. At the time of Joshua, there's the crossing of the Jordan.

And it is their time of coming in. And if the Red Sea fulfilled God's first great promise to Abraham, I'm going to make of you a great people. The Jordan crossing fulfilled the second great promise to Abraham.

[26 : 16] And I will make you in a promised land. Which means that now, at this point in the story, we are waiting for the third great promise to finally come. Which is, not only will I make of you a great people.

Not only will I bring you into a land. But from you, all peoples of the earth will be blessed. We're reading the history of Israel and waiting for when we get the mighty saving acts of God.

When do I get some mercy? When will you do something for me? Rather than just reading history. We're waiting for God to work for us. Well, if you haven't read the Bible, I have good news for you. That's a good day, isn't it? Wouldn't say my Australian friends. You come here not knowing much about God. And you're going to leave knowing that he's got mercy for you. Because as the Bible story unfolds, The crossing of the Red Sea and the going out, The traversing of the Jordan and the coming in, Culminate in a later mighty act of salvation That is brought to us by God At the cross of Jesus, His Son.

[27 : 49] It would take me some time to explain this to you, But perhaps the one who brought you today could do it better than I can over lunch.

But in Christ, In his death, On the spot of Golgotha, The place where the waters Of God's wrath Went over him Is yet to this day The place Of his saving Acts.

It is more, I have better news for you today Than the storyteller had for Israel. As stupendous As the crossing of the Jordan would have been, I am announcing to you That God has made a way From you to get from This world To the next world.

That he has the power To save you, To call you his own, To bring you out. And he has the power To traverse you And bring you in.

And if you wonder, Where is the sign? What is the memorial? What stones are there? He says, Well, from the Red Sea To the Jordan To the cross Of my beloved son.

[29 : 27] Walk Unto me Through his work. The stone of stones Then brings us To what I would call The song we sing.

I hope your heart is rising. I know mine is. The book of Hebrews Actually presents All of these Old Testament stories As fulfilled in Jesus.

Watch this. This is fascinating to me. Our story Gives us Moses As the connecting point. Moves through the people Coming across 4, 1 to 7 To Joshua himself Chapter 4, verse 8 To a description Of the priesthood 5 through 8 To the ark itself Verse 9 And the book of Hebrews Takes all of these Successive activities In this story And puts them all In interpretive lens Of what Jesus does.

Did you know That in Hebrews Chapter 3 The writer Is telling you That Jesus makes a way And he says to him Now I know you know About Moses And what God did Through him But let me tell you About the supremacy Of Jesus to Moses Then he says Now I know you About the people And that some of them Got in And some of them Didn't get in But let me tell you About the supremacy Of the people of God Under Christ Then he actually Moves on in Hebrews And actually talks About the high priesthood For three chapters Chapters 5, 6, 7 And even chapter 8 But he says All the

priesthood thing All the mercy seat thing Jesus is actually Superior to all Of those things That the people Traversed unto Their own salvation Then he gets to Chapter 9 in Hebrews And says let me Tell you about the ark Let me tell you About the mercy seat Let me tell you About the tent Let me tell you Where it all took place And he goes But Jesus Jesus My Jesus I love to tell The story Of Jesus And the glory It's gonna be My theme And it ought To be yours It ought to be The song we sing Oh What happened To our minds Wherein we so Quickly forget Jesus Let me put it to you This way Here In this chapter You have Israel Entering into the kingdom But in Christ You enter into Eternal rest Here You have a mighty Saving act That corresponds To the exodus But in Jesus You cross

[32 : 27] The Jordan Through watery Rivers That separate Earth from heaven Here We have a priesthood That is only capable Of providing Temporary And repetitive Sacrifices To make you Right with God But in Jesus You have One Act One Death One Watery Grave That stops The flow And enables you To pass I mean It's It's unbelievable I was listening This morning One song You have made A way He's made A way I think About our own Soul As a congregation Oh my soul Sing If you can't Sing that Today Then the word Of God Is not It's yet Needs to break Up your heart

Oh my Soul Sing That's what The stones And the story Of the stones Is to emit From us Here you have Twelve stones In a riverbed At the cross I have the place Where the rivers Of wrath Enable me To no longer Live as though Dead Practically Let me Close What are the Marks of our Song First There are Greater signs Than these That Jesus Has put Into place For us In two weeks Time We will In two weeks Time We will Celebrate Right here The Lord's Supper He He He Told us The memorial To make And he Said As often As you Do This Do This In Remembrance Of Me And when You do This You are Proclaiming You are Singing Of the Acts Of my Salvation In two Weeks Time In two Weeks Time Those who Have faith Will rise From their Seats Come forward For their Elements And partake Of the Signs That are Visible Tactile Tangible Taste Behold Bread Of heaven Behold Cup Of salvation In faith Sustenance Into the Presence Of God You don't Have to Build Any Memorial Just get

Back here In two Weeks Time And celebrate The Lord's Supper With us Second Practically We must Retell The gospel Story To our Children I'm going To put This To you For it is In the Core Of my Being No Greater Work Will be Given To Christ Church Chicago Than Telling Our Children And the Children Of this City About Jesus There's Not a Greater Work There's From The Nursery Where we Don't Babysit But we Care And nurture And speak God's Words To Kid City Where we Unfold In the Most Pleasing Of ways Possible The Great Saving Acts Of God In Christ To the Youth Ministry Where our Young Students Begin To Take For Themselves A Full And Complete Grasp Of all That God Has Done For Them That They Might Sing The Rest Of Their Lives For Him To Our University Work I Mean I'm Getting Too Far Away On The Rungs Of What The Text Says But put It This Way The Second!

[37 : 26] Thing There Don't Miss It Verse 21 When Your Children Ask Their Fathers In Times To Come Dads Have The Privileged Joy Of Being At The Table With Their Little Ones Of Holding Them In The Kitchen Of Looking Them In The Eye And Say I Love You Love You Love You Love You Love You Love You Love You Because God Loves You In Christ Sit Down At My Chaotic Table And Give Me At Least A Minute!

Every Night To Tell You Of God's Love For You In Jesus Parents This Is The Reason For Which You Are On Earth Passed Down I Believe This With All My Heart No Greater Work Will Be Given To This Church Than The Nurturing Of Our Children And Our Young Ones Protectively In The Gospel It Was The Hallmark Of This Ministry From The First Day It's Your Turn Now Three

There Are Other Reasons For Us To Daily And Weekly Remember There's Actually A Symbol In This Room That I Want You To Look At Now You Have To Look Up To See It Did You Know That When I Selected The Logo For Christ Church Chicago I Chose A Visible Sign That Would Remind Us Weekly Of God's Saving Acts In Our Midst There Are 24 Distinct!

Sections Of Stained Glass Panels Separated By Steel Ribbing And Within Each Section There Are Five Panels And The Lowest One The One Nearest To You Is The Most Elaborate And Within That Single Panel There Are I Believe 387 Distinct Pieces Of Stained Glass And The Visual Center Piece Of Each One Is A Cross Emblem I Don't Know How They Got It There Given They Were The Christian Science!

Church But At Any Rate I'm Taking Cross And This Is A Visible Reminder For You Every Week When You Come In And You Wonder Is God With Us Did He Do Something For Us And Jesus He

Did He Not Only Put It In Front Of Me 12 Times Like 12 Stones But 12 Times Twice Like 24 Stained Glass Panels To Remind You That He Loves You That He Saves You That He Brought You Out Of A Place Didn't He He's Going To Get You Into A Place Isn't He Finally You You Have

[41 : 23] A Responsibility To Take Care Of Your Self And Remember God's Kindnesses It Is Massively Important To Your Spiritual Health Your Lips Your Conversations Should Be Filled And Marked By What God Has Done For You Not What Other People Aren't Getting Right For You See the Difference Between The Generation Of Joshua's Day Which We'll See Followed The Lord In A Different Way Than Moses' Day Is That They Received That Word And They Lived Under It Joyfully All The Days Of Joshua's Life And All The Days That Even The Next Generation Would Come Because They Took Care Of Themselves I Like To Say Sometimes You Come Here We're Going To Treat You As An Adult And

We Got To Take Care Of Our So More Of Our Conversation Should Be Recounting The Many Ways And Things That God Has Done For Us That's A Great Way To Go To Lunch On The Front Step With Your Popsicle Tell Me What Has God Done For You That Actually Might Strike Up A Friendship Let Me Tell You What God Did For Me And All Of A Sud The Story Of The Stones Starts Its Way To The Songs That We Sing And That Is The Church To Be A Part Of Our Heavenly Father Thank You For

These Ancient Texts Which All Cascade Toward Your Work In Christ Which Burrow Into Our Own Heart By Faith And Bring Forth A Life Of Praise May We Know That You're Mighty And May We Live Lives Before You In Joyful Reverent Fear In Jesus Name We Pray Amen