

Stones of Remembrance

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[0:00] Stones of Remembrance. Last week, we talked about Israel on the final leg of their 40 years of wandering after making their way out of Egypt.

! And for 40 years, they were led by the Lord. Some people would say they wandered. Clearly, they did not wander. God knew exactly where they were going and exactly where they should be.

So we can't call it wandering, but at any rate, 40 years. And last week, in Joshua chapter 3, we looked at Israel finally crossing the Jordan into Canaan, the promised land.

And remember, we talked about they were to follow the Ark of the Covenant, and that was to be their guide. God's very presence rested on the Ark of the Covenant.

So they were commanded, follow the Ark. They were also told to consecrate themselves in preparation for that event. And that really applies to us as well, that we should consecrate ourselves, set ourselves apart so that God can work in us.

[1:15] So today, we're going to look at kind of a result of that crossing. And we're going to read in Joshua chapter 4, which is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua.

Joshua chapter 4, starting in verse 5. And we'll read 5 through 9, and then 19 through 24.

If I can find verse 5. Here we go. And Joshua said to them, And the people of Israel.

And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there.

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.

And they are there to this day. And then skipping forward to verse 19 through the end of the chapter. And they encamped at Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho.

[3:32] And those 12 stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the people of Israel, A little bit of the Lord, how many stones are there in this narrative?

There are 24 stones.

If you read carefully in verse 9 of chapter 4, 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.

And they're there to this day. This day being the day that the book of Joshua was actually written.

So, 12 stones in the river.

Kind of unique. What was the purpose of those 12 stones? Well, as you may remember from last week, while Israel was in the wilderness, it was not a good experience for them in terms of their relationship with the Lord.

[5:45] There was almost constant complaining. There was a desire to return to Egypt. At one point, they said to Moses, did you bring us out here to die?

We should have stayed in Egypt. And, of course, there was also the presence of sin when they created the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments.

They cast a golden... They cast an idol. And there was sin. I really believe that the reason Joshua placed those 12 stones in the bed of the River Jordan...

Now, remember, the waters have dried up. The people are crossing. He set up 12 stones there as a way to say, our wilderness experience is no more.

It is gone and forgotten. Those stones were not easily seen, even though they remained in the bed of the Jordan. It was like this is the end of that time.

[7:00] And really, as you think about it, God doesn't want us looking back on negative experiences in our own life. He didn't want Israel looking back at past sins.

We should not be looking back at past sins. He did not want there to be regrets that would be brought forward like we should have stayed in Egypt.

And he certainly doesn't want us returning to old sinful habits, which we so easily do. The passage I read this morning from Galatians 5, for freedom, God has set us free.

But don't use that freedom to return to your old ways of the law. Use your freedom to build up one another, to love one another.

So, then the next question. And I think this is a little bit like kids in Sunday school, when they get asked the question, what is gray, collects nuts, lives in trees, and hibernates a little bit during the winter?

[8:29] And one of the kids says, well, it sounds like a squirrel, but since we're in Sunday school, I'm going to say Jesus.

So, this question, there is a very obvious answer to this question. What was the purpose of the stones that were removed from the Jordan River?

Verse 21, chapter 4.

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, just as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea when he dried up, 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, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.

[10:00] Those are the four things, the reason why God said, set up those rocks. probably the first one is, well, they're all equally important, and yet, I think that first one has an important message so that the fathers could tell their children.

And that was the proper order, that fathers should tell their children what God had done for them. What a marvelous message that was.

See, God, God, by stopping the waters, by letting them cross on dry ground, demonstrated his power to the nation of Israel, and he also demonstrated a very personal love for the nation of Israel. He did that by having them cross on dry ground. He performed this miracle so that they didn't even get their feet wet as they crossed what had been the Jordan River.

And yet, in that same miracle, he was powerful enough to stop the flow of the river that indeed, they could cross that.

[11:28] in the reason why those stones were there, there's a reference to the Red Sea experience.

Israel, when they first came out of Egypt, came to the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were following them to try to overtake them and bring them back to Egypt.

They needed a miracle. And God provided one. He separated the waters of the Red Sea and led them across on dry ground.

And what does Israel, and what do we gain from that? Well, the idea that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The miracle that God did at the Red Sea with the nation of Israel and bringing them across was the same kind of miracle he performed at the Jordan when they crossed, both on dry ground.

[12:39] But Israel, in that, had to see that we have an unchanging, powerful, loving God. Malachi 3.6 says, For I, the Lord, do not change.

And James 1.17 also echoes that same thought. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

So we have this picture of a God who is the same and performs the same way with the nation of Israel as well as, in our case, that is the same God we serve today who has power to stop the Red Sea or open the Red Sea to stop the River Jordan to bring people, his people, into the Promised Land.

Same God, same power. It also speaks about God's eternal characteristic.

Israel saw him, God, as Alpha and Omega in this story. Again, they come out of Egypt and they move through the Red Sea.

[14:09] They spend 40 years with God in the wilderness and then finally he brings them into the Promised Land, a land that had been promised to this people in the Abrahamic Covenant.

So the start of the story for these people was leaving Egypt. The end of this part of the story was entering the Promised Land and in that they saw God as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end and they could worship him for that characteristic.

also it says that all the people of the earth would know that the hand of the Lord is mighty.

See, this miracle, while it was specifically for Israel to bring them into the Promised Land, it was also that all the other peoples that inhabited Israel that were getting ready to fight with Israel because they were going to take the Promised Land, they got to see this miracle.

Paul in Romans 1 chapter 1 verse 20 it says for his, God's, invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made so they are without excuse.

[15 : 44] see, God's eternal power and divine nature are seen even in creation and in the crossing of the Jordan River, the people who witnessed that also got to witness God's mighty power and divine nature and they are without excuse.

and then finally, the last reason that those stones were placed there was that you, nation of Israel, may fear the Lord your God forever.

See, they were to look back at who God was, what God had done for them. Those kind of things God encourages even us to look back on his goodness to us and we all have stories of how God has provided for us.

We talked about it here this morning in a very practical matter, Morgan needed a car. God cared enough to provide that car.

That's the love of God. That's his goodness demonstrated to us. And that's an example for all of us because we all joined in prayer for that.

[17 : 14] And then we're to look back at God's attributes and as I just mentioned those attributes that the people of Israel and those surrounding that area witnessed his attributes and his characteristics his eternal nature his strength the alpha and the omega that never changing those kind of things are good for us to look back on and reflect on and they are anchors for us as we serve the Lord.

And finally it's good to remember Christ's death on the cross. This morning we will celebrate communion together and that is also a stone of remembrance if you will even though it's not called that in scripture.

The last thing I'd like to talk to you about is the timing. In chapter 4 verse 19 it says the people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and they encamped at Gilgal.

It would be very easy to just ignore that part of the story and say I don't understand that. I don't know why that's included in there.

Is it even important? And it is important. See God had a plan for Israel. He had told them that they were going to wander for 40 years.

[18 : 59] He brought them into the promised land on the tenth day of the first month. The tenth day of the first month was the day that the household was to select a lamb that would be sacrificed in preparation for the Passover.

Passover. The Passover is the plague that actually got Israel out of Egypt and brought them now ultimately to the promised land.

But God had said 40 years you're going to wander. God brought them into the land four days before that 40th anniversary so that they would be able to commemorate and remember Passover.

His grace and mercy in doing that is just abundant in this story of how he did that and that's why there's this reference to it.

If you're really interested and want to look into it, look at Exodus chapter 12. Don't do it now, but this week go back and look at Exodus chapter 12 where it talks about preparing the lamb and the day that that is to be done.

[20 : 27] You're going to find that it's the tenth day of the first month. Passover was something that God commanded the Jews to celebrate as a way to remind them how the blood of the lamb that they would sacrifice saved them from death.

The Passover was a family meal and it commemorated their new beginning as God's redeemed people. Jesus gave the bread and wine new meaning when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples just before his death on the cross.

He instituted a new remembrance meal called the Lord's Supper or Communion as a reminder that he's the lamb of God, our Passover lamb who was sacrificed to take away our sins.

In 1 Corinthians 11 which we'll look at even closer during communion it says, Paul writes of the Lord's Supper in a worship setting instructing us to celebrate it in remembrance of him.

Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Celebrating communion is an act of worship where we remember his sacrifice for us.

[22:10] Today we've looked at stones of remembrance that were so important for Israel to remember what God had done for them. What's interesting is God said that those stones of remembrance are important for your children, for you as a nation to remember the crossing and bringing into the promised land.

But even more, he wanted them in the promised land so that they could celebrate the Passover. A different kind of remembrance but important just the same.

And like I said, Christ changed the narrative of the Passover when he said he was the Passover lamb and that his death would provide salvation for all of us.

So we'd like to partake of communion now, realizing this is a memorial that we are celebrating. We invite you to share with us.

If you know Jesus Christ as your personal savior, we invite you to partake of this. And Frank, if you'll come up and we will serve you.

[23:30] And before we do that, I'd like to pray and just ask the Lord's blessing on this. Father, we thank you so much that we can celebrate communion, realizing that we are doing that in remembrance of you.

You have given us a stone of remembrance in communion, saying that we are to do this. And so, Father, it is a joy and it is an act of worship that we now perform, praising you, thanking you, and remembering your death on the cross for our sins.

Please hold the bread until everyone has been served and then we'll take it together.