

Joshua 3 & 4

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[0 : 00] And I would like us this morning to take for a text words which we find in verse 6. Joshua 4 verse 6. When your children ask in time to come, what do those stones mean to you?

What do those stones mean to you? I want to suggest this morning by way of introduction that there is a link between this narrative which we read here and the narrative in the New Testament where Jesus is baptized.

We didn't read it, but it's a well-known narrative when Jesus is baptized in the River Jordan by John. And the first reason that I believe that there's a link between the two narratives is because of the location.

They both occurred in the River Jordan, but it's more specific than that. As we know, Israel, when they came out of Egypt, they traveled northeast through the wilderness. And they passed over the Jordan just north of the Dead Sea at a place called Beth-a-Bara.

Now, Beth-a-Bara may mean little to you and to I, but in the context of the New Testament, in John chapter 1 and verse 28, we read, if you have an AV, that John was baptizing in the region of the Jordan called Beth-a-Bara.

[1 : 28] And you may say, well, that's good, but that's not much of a link. But there's more than that. The action in the two narratives seems to be the same. You see here, the reason that we read Joshua 3 and 4 is because they're so joined.

You can't really have one without the other. And in Joshua 3, we're told that the Ark of the Covenant went before the people into the water. Now, as we know, the Ark of the Covenant signified God's presence with his people.

So it was the Lord who went before the people into the waters of the Jordan. And then you come to the baptism of Jesus and God himself, the God-man, Jesus Christ, himself goes into the very same waters of the Jordan.

And again, you may say, well, that's good, but there's not much of a link there. But the final reason I believe that there is a link between the two narratives is because of the emphasis of the two narratives.

You see, the emphasis of this narrative isn't so much to display the Lord's salvation. We've already seen that in Israel's journey. You remember when they crossed the Red Sea and they came out of Egypt and the Lord separated that water and allowed them to pass over.

[2 : 48] That was to emphasize God's salvation. That God had taken Israel, heard their cries from Egypt and took them away from the enemy and saved them from the enemy and brought them out.

But the emphasis of the passing of the Jordan is to emphasize the new life that they would have. Why is it that Israel passed the Jordan?

They passed it in order to get to Canaan. And in Canaan, they were to have this new life. And so the emphasis of the Jordan passing isn't so much salvation as it was at the Red Sea.

But the emphasis is resurrection. That they are passing from the death of the wilderness and the loneliness of the wilderness into this new life that they will have in Canaan.

And you come to the narrative of Jesus being baptized. Why is it that Jesus was baptized? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Everyone else was baptized because of sin.

[3 : 53] Everyone else John baptized. They were there confessing sins and seeking repentance. That couldn't have been the case with Jesus. Jesus was sinless. He had no sin to repent of and therefore no need to be baptized.

And he's not there just to point to John as other people think. The reason that Jesus is baptized is because there he unites himself with his people.

He comes in with his people. And he says by his actions of what he is going to do in his ministry. As he takes upon himself their sins.

He goes into the Jordan to unite himself with them. Because that's what his ministry is all about. It's about taking on their sins.

And dying in their room and in their stead at Calvary. And there he wins for them new life. He wins for his people the opportunity of resurrection life.

[4 : 57] That through the death of Christ those who believe on him by faith can have a new life. A resurrection life raised from dead to life. Or as Paul says in Romans 6 verse 4.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.

We too might walk in newness of life. And so when we read this narrative of the children of Israel passing the Jordan.

We ask what is the emphasis of it. The emphasis is of this new life that they will have. That's what the whole narrative is about. That they would achieve this new life in Canaan's land.

But it reminds us too of what Christ has won for us. In giving us this new life. And to mark this narrative in Joshua 4.

[5 : 59] There are two memorials erected. Sometimes we misread it and we think there's only one. But there's clearly in verse 8. Joshua instructs the people to take 12 stones out of the Jordan.

And to take them with them to the place that they would lodge. A place called Gilgal. And in verse 9 we see a second memorial. Joshua himself sets up the stones in the middle of the Jordan.

And so there's these two memorials. There's one at the place where they crossed. And there's one in Gilgal. Taken with them from the Jordan.

And the question that we must ask. And the question that the people would ask when they saw these stones. Is what do those stones mean? The whole narrative is about God's delivering of the people to a new land.

But what do the stones mean? And I want us this morning to come. And to see four things. That I believe these stones mean. And I want us to keep in our mind.

[7 : 04] The fact that we too have this new life. If we are by faith trusting in Christ. And so we can ask. As we remember not the Jordan passage. But what Christ did for us.

We can ask. What do the stones of the gospel mean for us? What does what Christ did mean for us? I want us to see four things.

Firstly then. I want us to see that it shows Israel. What they were saved from. You see. A problem that people have with this narrative.

Is that they believe that this memorial. That Joshua sets up. The second one. I want us to focus on first. It says in verse 9. Joshua set up 12 stones in the midst of the Jordan.

Now. The problem that people have with that. Is that they say. Well if Joshua set up. A memorial stone. In the middle of the Jordan. Surely when the waters reset.

[8 : 05] The stones would be covered. And there would no be. There wouldn't be a memorial for anybody. But you see. That's why we have to read Joshua 3. Because it tells us that.

The place where Joshua was instructed. To set the stone memorial. Was the place. Where the priests first stood. In the waters of the Jordan.

That's what it says. Joshua was told to set up. A memorial. At the place. Where the priests. Bearing the ark of the covenant. Had stood. And Joshua 3. He tells us.

That that place. Was at the very bank. Of the Jordan. So. If you can picture it. In your mind. This memorial. That Joshua sets up. Is not in the middle of the Jordan.

Where the water is deepest. But rather. It's at the very bank. Of the Jordan. The place where the water is shallowest. It's at the very edge. Of the Jordan River.

[9 : 00] But notably. It's at the side. Of the wilderness. The memorial. The memorial is not set up. On Canaan side. It's set up.

On the wilderness side. And if there was ever. To be an Israelite. Who returned. To the borders. Of the promised land. Or ever in his mind. Returned to this event. And someone asked him.

What do those stones mean? You see the stones. That stand. On the wilderness side. Of the Jordan. What do those stones mean? The Israelite would smile.

And say. They remind me. Of where I've been saved from. Why? Because. The memorial was on that side. It reminded them. Of the place where they had come from.

The wilderness. And don't be mistaken. The wilderness was a lonely place. It was a place of trial. It was a place of sin. It was a place of death.

[9 : 56] For Israel. And so when the Israelite remembers. And is asked. What do the stone memorials there mean? It reminds them of the place. That God had brought them from.

He brought me. From the wilderness. He brought me. From that side of the river. Over to this other side. To this new life. That I can have in Canaan.

What do those stones mean? They mean that I have been saved. From death. And you know. For a Christian today. If you are here.

And by faith. You trust in Jesus Christ. And what he won for you. On Calvary's cross. When he took your sin. When you think upon that work.

And I ask you. What does the gospel mean to you? What does the work of Jesus mean to you? I hope that the same smile. Comes over your face.

[10 : 51] And you say. It reminds me. Of what I've been saved from. You think back. To your wilderness journey. To the time you spent.

When you didn't know. This new life. You didn't know the Lord. And you remember that. In your mind. I don't know. How long ago that was. For some.

It may have been a long time ago. But. There's a memorial. Set up there. There are stones. Set up in your mind. There. And you remember. The fact. That it was from there.

That the Lord. Saved you. From that fearful pit. And miry clay. We so often sing. From Psalm 40. From that place. Of death. And loneliness.

The Lord. Brought you. And you know. I don't know. How difficult. That journey was. For you. The passing. Of your own. Spiritual Jordan. If you like. When God brought you.

[11 : 45] From death. To life. Maybe. For some of us. That was a short journey. The Lord. And his providence. Took us very quickly. And he raised us.

In a moment. From death. To life. But perhaps. For others. It took longer. Many years. Maybe. And you remember that. And so.

When the question. Comes to you. What do those stones mean? You remember it. With such fondness. And you say. It reminds me. That my Lord.

Saved me. That he took me. From death. And from being. Without hope. And without God. In this world. And he took me. From death. To life.

That's what the gospel. Means to me. It means that I have been. Saved. From an endless death. But maybe. This morning. You are here. And you cannot.

[12 : 41] Relate to that. At all. Perhaps. For you. This morning. There is. No stone memorial. Because. For you. As yet. You do not.

Trust in the Lord. And I hope. There is one question. On your mind. How is it. That I come. To know. This new life. How is it.

That I come. To know. What these Christians. Know. How is it. That I come. To know. This resurrection. Life. How is it. That I can cross. The Jordan. Well.

That is what I want us. To see. Secondly. Firstly. What they were saved from. Secondly. What they are saved by. You see. Again. The reason we read.

Joshua 3 and 4. Is to tell us. About the whole narrative. And when we read that. We see that the ark. Of the covenant. Of the Lord. Went before them. And they had to follow that.

[13 : 36] And verse 7. Of chapter 4. Tells us. That the moment. The ark of the covenant. Went before them. The waters. Of the Jordan. Were cut off. The people.

Followed this ark. And the moment. It passed into the waters. The water stopped. And so. If you were to ask. An Israelite. How is it. That you passed the Jordan.

Would they tell you. It was because of the ark. Well. They might. But the Israelite. Knew so much more than that. The Israelite. Knew. What the ark. Of the covenant. Signified.

You see. The importance. Of this ark. Wasn't in its physical qualities. It wasn't in what it looked like. As beautiful as it was.

The importance. Of the ark. Of the covenant. Is what it signified. Spiritually. And in Exodus. 26. And verse 22. God says.

[14 : 30] There. Speaking of the ark. I will meet. With you. From above. The mercy seat. You see. The ark. Of the covenant. Was signifying. To the Israelite.

That God. Was with them. It was God's presence. Amongst. His people. And so. When you come. To the Israelite. And you tell them. What do those stones. Mean to you. You see these stones. At the bank of the Jordan. What do they mean. What do they mean. To you. And he would tell you. They remind me. Of the day. That the Lord. Went before us. And he went. Into the Jordan. And the waters. Of the Jordan. Were cut off. So that we. Could walk through. You ask the Israelite. How is it. That you got to Canaan. Not one of them. Would say. It was because. Of how good. We were. How obedient. We were. Because we. Tunneled. [15:25] Under the Jordan. Or we bridged. Over it. The only reason. The Israelites. Got. To Canaan. Was because. They were saved. By God's.

Presence. And God's. Mercy. Upon them. And you know. What that reminds me of. It reminds me of. The Christian. Here today. As I ask you. What does the gospel. Mean to you. What does the work. Of Jesus. Mean to you. How are you. Saved. Today. I know you are saved. From death. But. What are you saved. By. Not by the ark. Of the covenant. In Jeremiah. Chapter 3. Verse 16.

There's an interesting. Version. It says. When you have. Multiplied. And been fruitful. In the land. In those days. Declares the Lord. They shall no more. Say. [16:19] The ark. Of the covenant. Of the Lord. It shall not. Come to mind. Or be remembered. Or missed. It shall not. Be made again. And you see.

For the Christian. Today. We're not saved. By the ark. Of the covenant. Going before us. Because we have. Something much greater. And that's. What the importance. Of the baptism. Of Jesus. Is symbolizing. You see. The ark. Of the covenant. Was signifying. God's presence. With us. But you see.

In Jesus Christ. We have Emmanuel. God. With us. The reason. We don't need. An ark. Of the covenant. It's because. We have something. Much greater. We have Jesus Christ. Who is God. With us. And he came. Into this world. And he became. One of us. And he had mercy. Upon us. And he went. To Calvary's cross. And there. As those. [17:15] Who stood. In the Jordan. With him. Confessed their sins. There. He took. Their sins. And he died. Before God. The father. And he paid.

The ransom. And he paid. So that. God would be satisfied. And the divine wrath. Against sin. Yours and mine. If we believe on him.

Would be paid. Once. And for all. My Christian friend. How are you saved. Today. You are saved. Because of God's presence.

And God's mercy. Found in God's son. Your mediator. Your savior. The Lord. Jesus Christ. And so. When I ask you today. What do those stones mean? What does the gospel mean? You tell me. It reminds me.

[18:11] That I have been saved. By God's presence. And his mercy. By God's son. And my savior. By Jesus Christ. And so today. If you're here.

And you're still not a Christian. And you're still asking. That great question. How is it. That I get to Canaan? How is it.

That I pass the Jordan. Or to put it bluntly. How is it. That I become a Christian? It is by believing. In God's presence.

And God's mercy. In the person. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. And in the work. That he alone. Has done. And I tell you. Nothing else.

You see. The Israelite. Could not boast. Of his own endeavors. And there's nothing. Sure. Than the fact. That you could try.

[19:05] Your whole life. And reach. And try to reach. A path. To heaven. My friend. You'll never find it. Unless you find it.

In the Lord. Jesus Christ. It is not. By our obedience. It is not. By our good works. It is not. By anything.

That we can do. In and of ourselves. So my friend. Stop crying. But find. The answer. In the one. Who goes. Before you.

The Lord. Jesus Christ. Come. And put your. All upon him. I tell you. That's how you get. To the promised land. That's how you get.

To heaven. And that's how you pass. From death. To life. But you know. There's another memorial. In verse seven. In verse eight.

[20 : 00] The people of Israel. Took twelve stones. With them. And they set them. In the place. That they lodged. In a place called Gilgal. And again. We read. That people.

Were to come. To them. And ask. Verse. Twenty one. What do those. Stones. Mean. And so. This time. We're no longer. At the banks. Of the Jordan.

Now. We're in the promised land. At a place. Called Gilgal. And you come. To an Israelite. And you tell them. You see these stones. Not the stones.

At the Jordan. But these stones. In Gilgal. What do those stones. Remind you of? What do they mean. To you? And again. The Israelite. With a smile. On his face. Tells you.

It reminds me. That we are saved. To serve. You know. I've often wondered. If at. Remarkable moments.

[20 : 53] In. The history of Israel. Like this moment. If there was ever. A temptation. For God's people. To say. Let's just stay. Where we are. I wonder.

If those priests. Bearing the ark. In the middle of the Jordan. Witnessing this remarkable event. Of the waters. As I keep on both sides. And people passing through. On dry ground.

I wonder. If there was ever. The temptation. For one of these men. To say. Oh. Can't we stay? Just give us. Five minutes more. In this place.

So that we can soak in. Something more. Of God's glory. And this. Beautiful moment. It would be a great moment. And it would be a great desire. To stay there.

But then maybe. They hear the words. Of Joshua. In verse 17. When he says. Come up out of the Jordan. It's time to go. Why? Because you can't stay here.

[21 : 50] There is work. For you to do. You have to learn more. About this promise. Of God to you. You have to understand. More of what God has. For you in Canaan. You have children.

To teach. You have children. To tell. Of the gospel. And of how you passed. And what those stones mean. And verse 24. Reminds us. That they also.

Had a work to do. To the very ends. Of the earth. The peoples. Of the earth. You see. The reason. That they cannot stay. In the Jordan. Is because. They have so much work. To do in Canaan.

And so. You come to the Israelite. And you tell them. You see these stones. At Gilgal. What do they mean to you? They tell you. They mean that we have been saved. To serve.

We have work to do. In Canaan. Oh. We'd love to stay. At the Jordan. But we have work to do. In Canaan. I spoke to water in the pulpit. But never mind. We have work to do.

[22 : 45] In Canaan. And you see. For the people of Israel. They realized that. And they weren't. Taken up with. The things in the past. They were great moments. But they realized.

They had to go on. And you know. That is so true. For us to. And so often. We are tempted. To go back. Are we not? You know.

I'm sure. The moment. That God took us. From death. To life. It's a great moment. A remarkable moment. In our experience.

And the temptation. Is for us to say. I would long. To go back. And to enjoy. That spiritual moment. Again. And then you hear. The words of Joshua.

Say. Come up out of that Jordan. You've got to go on. You've got work to do. You need to learn. More about the promise. You need to learn.

[23 : 40] More about what you've been saved to. You've got children. To teach. You've got. The ends of the earth. To go to. And to tell them. Of all that God. Has done to you.

So I ask you this morning. What does the gospel. Mean to you. And you tell me. It means that I have been. Saved to serve. Oh I know. That there have been.

Great moments. Even in the life. Of this congregation. And. I was never around. For the great revivals. In the past. And yet I hear of them often. And the temptation.

Is to say. I would love. To go back. To those moments. And they're great moments. Don't get me wrong. But we cannot go back. Because we're saved.

To serve now. And instead of looking back. To great moments. There's a place. And a time. For that. We have to go on. And we have to grow.

[24 : 36] Ourselves. In the knowledge. And grace. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have to tell. Our children. I love this verse. When the children. Come to you. And say. What do those stones mean?

I find that. One of the best warrants. For Sabbath school teaching. That I've ever seen. It's the children. Who ask the question. And when they ask us. What does the gospel. Mean to you? We have to have an answer. For them. We have to tell them. And not only that. We have to go. To all the peoples. Of the earth. You know my friend. I've said it before. I'm going to say it again. There are homes. In this town. And it breaks my heart. That they know nothing. About this God. And nothing. About the gospel. And we have to go to them. And I come to you. And I ask you. What does the gospel.

[25 : 30] Mean to you? And you tell me. It means that I have to go to them. That's what Gilgal's all about. That there's work. Yet. To do. My friend.

Does it burden your heart. Today. For these people. To go and to tell them. To tell them of the gospel. To tell them of what the Lord has done for you. But also what he could do for them. Don't get me wrong. I'm not dismissing what has happened in the past. We have lessons to learn from it. Many of them. But you know. I don't long to see. Those past days. I long to see future days like them. And I long to see what the Lord could yet do. And we have to have the heart that says. This gospel reminds me. That I am saved.

[26 : 28] To serve. Finally. I want us to see. That we are saved in hope. Saved from death. Saved by God's presence.

And mercy. Saved to serve. Finally. Saved in hope. Verse 19. The people came up out of the Jordan. On the tenth day. And they encamped at Gilgal. And I want us to come one final time. To that Israelite. And to ask him. What do those stones mean? And they'll say. They mean. With a smile on his face. There's so much yet to come. Gilgal. Wasn't the end. The Lord had appointed a place for Israel. A place in which they would dwell. And Gilgal was just another stop on the journey. They would move on from there.

[27 : 24] And as they looked at those stones in Gilgal. And they took in what those stones mean. They would say. This stone reminds me. That I am saved in the hope.

That there's so much more to come. That there's still a place to come. That I will dwell forever. You see for Israel. They had no continuing city at Gilgal. But they were longing for a city to come. And for the Christian here today. Is that not exactly the same? I ask you. What does the gospel mean to you? What do those stones mean to you? You tell me. It means that I am saved in a hope. The hope that here is not the end. But that there's so much more to come. Oh you know I love that the very last word of this chapter. Is the word forever. There was a forever in the mind of Joshua.

[28 : 26] And a forever in the mind of Israel. And they knew that they would not find their forever in Gilgal. But that the city that the Lord had for them.

Was still to come. And so there was battles to be had. Enemies to be defeated. But they went on in the hope that God had much in store for them. You know as a Christian here today. Is that not your hope too? I know there are many battles. Left to be had. God willing. In this world. Many things left to do. But I know that for you. Your hope is that here you have no continuing city. But you seek a city that is to come. Whose builder and maker is the Lord. And in that place you can dwell forever.

[29 : 26] Is that what your heart yearns for today? That place where you will be with him forever. And so I come to you. And I ask you.

What do those stones mean to you? What does the gospel mean to you? I hope you tell me like I believe the Israelites would tell us. It reminds me. That I have been saved from death. That I have been saved by God's presence and mercy. That I am saved to serve him now. But I am saved in the hope. That the best is yet to come. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Our gracious God.

We acknowledge that when we consider the work of our Savior. And the work of the gospel. It reminds us of much. But we pray oh Lord God.

[30 : 31] That we would never be forgetful. That we would never in any way forget. What the Lord has done for us. Make us a people who remember well.

Who know that we have been saved. From the death of sin. To life in Christ. Help us to know oh Lord God. And to rest the assurance of our faith in the fact.

That it's only in what Christ has done. Help us to know too. Help us to know too. That we have a great work to do. Help us with that work we pray. We are so often taken up with the wrong things. So often lazy in your service. Help us to know. Help us to be active. Help us to remember what Christ has done for us. And to know that we have so much to do for him.

But help us too and fill us. With the joy of heaven. Fill us with that joy we pray. And go before us. For Jesus sake. Amen.

[31 : 32] Our final singing this morning is Psalm 86 from the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 86 from the Scottish Psalter. You'll find that on page 341 in the Blue Psalm books. We're going to sing from verse 13 to the end of the Psalm.

The key word in these verses appears to be the word mercy. Time and time again the mercy of God is noted in these words. And it reminds us too I hope as we sing them.

Of God's mercy for us and on us. Because thy mercy toward me in greatness doth excel. And thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell.

O God the proud against me rise. And violent men have met. For my soul have sought. And thee before them have not set. But thou art full of pity Lord. A God most gracious.

[32 : 46] Long suffering and in thy truth. And mercy plenteous. O turn to me thy countenance. And mercy on me have. Thy servant strengthen. And the son of thine own handmaid save.

Show me a sign for good. That they which do me hate may see. And be ashamed. Because thou Lord didst help and comfort me. We'll sing these verses to the tune Evan.

To the praise of God. To the praise of God.

And the river passed my soul, like on the lowest hell.

For God the proud against me rise, and my death may not bear.

[34 : 00] But for my soul hath sought out me, before then hath not stayed.

But the world full of pity, Lord, and of all's gracious.

Long-suffering, unenvited, and mercy plentious.

O turn to me, thy condemnation, and mercy on me have.

Thy servants strengthened, and the sun of thy own heart made sail.

[35 : 21] Show me a sight for good luck day, which to me it may see.

And be ashamed, behold the Lord, his help and comfort me.

We'll close in prayer. Our gracious God, we pray that you would bless the tea that is to be enjoyed next door. And we pray that you would go before us, that you would lead us and guide us.

Bring us out this evening, if it is your will. And to your name be all the glory, now and forevermore. Amen.