

The Purpose of The Stones: Remembering the Mighty Deeds of the Lord

Joshua

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Well, good morning. It's good to see you all this morning, to be with you this morning. As Brother James mentioned, it is a delight of mine to be able to serve here, to serve with you. I cannot thank you enough for how you have been so welcoming to me, how you have extended your kindness to me. I promise I am trying to learn names. It can be a lot and I'm not great with names, so I'm learning, bear with me. I've probably already forgotten your name a few times. I'll get it down eventually, I promise.

Well, as was mentioned, I am 25 years old, just moved from Louisville, Kentucky where I spent the last eight years of my life studying God's word at Boyce College and in Southern Seminary which was absolutely a delight to be able to do that. That's where I met Scott and Maggie and then got connected to this church. It's funny, I have been traveling to this area for most of my life to visit family, I mean, 10 minutes away from here, had no idea this church was here, had no idea that any of you were here so it's funny how the Lord has his timing in bringing all things together.

Well, if you have your Bible this morning, and I hope you do, we are going to be in the book of Joshua, Joshua 3 through chapter 4. I want to thank the elders for the opportunity to preach this morning, to be able to bring the Lord's word to you, and for the opportunity to serve you. You will see a whole lot more of me in the coming days as I get to work alongside the elders, serving them in various roles, but predominantly working with families. As was mentioned, I have a big passion for the city of Atlanta. I absolutely love this city and the area surrounding it. I was actually originally born in the Marietta area, moved when I was very young so my dad could take on an associate pastor role in a small town in Kentucky, Somerset, Kentucky, where I was convinced when I was moving there that all the bathrooms were outhouses. I was mistaken. I had somebody tell me that. They definitely lied to me. But absolutely love Kentucky, spent 18 years of my life there, got to grow up there, but for some reason Georgia has just always been home to me. I think part of it is having a lot of my family here, the other part of it is just knowing how desperately this area needs the gospel. You look at all sorts of different charts and reasons, North American Mission Board has identified the area surrounding Atlanta as a hotbed that needs churches. You look within that and our area, the Sandy Springs area, are really hot areas that need the church so desperately, you see so many different cultures in the area

that have several different religions that just need to hear the gospel. So I have a primary passion for this area. I want to spend my life here if the Lord wills but I'm thankful to now be able to come here.

A lot of the leading up to this was interesting. I had prayed to move since I was seven years old, which I know sounds kind of strange that a seven year old is saying that, but bear with me. When we moved, it was actually 2003 when we moved from the Marietta area up to Somerset, Kentucky. I told my parents then, "I'm coming back." And I swore I was coming back to the area. Now that's a bold claim for a child to make but I knew this is where I wanted to be. For many years I prayed that I would be able to come back, I tried coming back several times. It didn't work out well for me when I tried coming back. So I had pretty much given up at that point. I really had given up on the hope of being able to come here. I had tried all sorts of different things to make it work. It never worked and then this winter happened and things started to fall in line. So I have lost my idea of being down here, I was ready to just plant myself in the Kentucky area and say, okay, the Lord has me here, I'm going to stay here, and then God opened up a few doors. I had a couple of meetings that opened up the door for me to come down here, but then the question that my father posed to me is actually several questions, was if you're going to do this, you need to make sure you have everything in line because that's the type of person my dad is. He is making sure everything is strict and rigid with his sister back there smiling because she knows it's true. My dad has to make sure everything is taken care of before you go after something.

So when I called him and said, "Dad, I think I'm moving to Atlanta," which was kind of out of the blue. He knew I wanted to do it but I hadn't talked to him about it. I said, "I want to go to Atlanta," and he said, "Okay, do you have a job?" That's kind of important, maybe I should answer that question. Then the Lord opened the door for the job. He said, "Well, you need to make sure you get a job with good health insurance," mostly because his favorite thing to say is, "You're off the payroll now. You've got to figure it out." So I found a job with good health insurance. That was taken care of. Had to find a place to live. Well, I had family step up and say you can stay with us until you find a place. So God answered that prayer. He said you've got to find a church. God answered that prayer as I'm standing before you this morning. So time and time again when I said, "Lord, I want to come here but it seems like this is not where I'm supposed to be," I waited and I waited and then God opened the door. He opened the door and then he answered every single question that I had, every single doubt that I had as to why I should come here, if I can come here.

He answered all of those questions in amazing and powerful ways and now in the book of Joshua, we find Israel in the same boat. Israel is in the same boat. They have heard that they are going to be able to go into the land of promise, they want to go into the Promise Land, but they had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and it seems like time and time again, every time they try they fail mostly because they can't get out of their own way, but they are longing to go into the land but God says not yet. Not yet, because he's working something far greater. But now the time has arrived in the book of Joshua and we'll look at the context in just a second. The time has arrived where they are going

to go into the land. The time has arrived but something stands before them. The Jordan River stands before them. So they know they're going into the land but that Jordan stands before them and then great armies stand before them. What are they going to do now? They have big questions. They want to go into the land but the big question is can we go into the land? So what will the Lord do? How will the Lord answer those big questions?

Now to give you a little bit of the context of the book that we're in this morning, we actually have to go all the way back to Genesis 12. Now I'm going to give you a very abbreviated history of where we're going to go but we're going to go from Genesis 12 all the way to the book of Joshua. So in Genesis 12 God makes a covenant with Abram. We're going to call him Abraham because his name is changed and it just makes it easier for all of us not to get confused. He makes a covenant with Abraham. So hear the word of our Lord from Genesis 12:1 through 3.

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So in Genesis 12, God makes a promise to his servant Abraham, that he will make him a great nation and in him all the families of the earth will be blessed. It's what we know as a promise or a covenant. God makes a covenant with Abraham that he is going to make him a great nation.

Now from Genesis 12 to where we are in Joshua 3 goes as follows. Israel was formed out of the line of Abraham through the family of Jacob. You see 12 tribes formed out of that. And then through the faithfulness of Joseph, so we're just flying past it here, the faithfulness of Joseph, Israel is now brought into Egypt. They are brought into Egypt during a great famine. There is no food to be found. There is a great drought. What are they going to do? Through the faithfulness of Joseph and growing up in the Egyptian world, he is able to bring Israel into this land that had a great grain storage so they were provided. The Lord provided for them in Egypt and Israel had favor with Pharaoh at that time, but things quickly changed. Israel started to grow in stature. The nation was exploding just as God had promised so their numbers are expanding rapidly. Now if you have somebody staying in your home and you start to see more and more people staying in your home, it can get a little overwhelming. You start to get crowded out and that's what's happening to the Egyptians at this point. They're starting to be crowded out. Israel is growing very rapidly and they're starting to choke them out and what Pharaoh realizes at the time is if they ever get mad at us and decide they want to partner up with one of our enemies, we are done for. So what Pharaoh does instead of continuing the favor that he was showing them is he oppresses them and he puts them in slavery. Israel is now slaves of the Egyptians. They are far away from the land of promise. They are in trouble and they are in need of help.

In Exodus 4 all the way through chapter 6, God raises up his servant Moses who is a very important character where we're going to be this morning and all throughout the Bible. He raises up Moses to be the deliverer. So God raises up this man and says, "You are going to deliver my people." Now Moses then leads the people if you know Exodus well, he leads the people out of captivity, right? We see the plagues. Pharaoh says, "Let my people go," according to the movie, right? Sends them out, right? And then they are going to the Red Sea but here's the problem. There's something that stands before them and it is this massive sea. The Egyptians are now at their tails trying to take them out. The sea stands before them, what are they going to do? Do they turn tail and run and hope the Egyptians give them favor again? No, God steps in. He steps in and he parts the water and Moses leads the people across the Red Sea on dry ground and when they cross, the waters crash in and the armies are overtaken. God delivers them.

In Exodus 19 through 31, Israel is at Sinai receiving the law. So Moses is up on the mountain with Yahweh receiving the law. It's a very holy spectacle because there is thunder and lightning, clouds of smoke, all sorts of mighty and powerful things are going on. Israel is at the base of the mountain literally shaking in their boots and what do they do? They sin against the Lord. They create the golden calf and now they have plunged themselves into deeper sin.

Now moving further into the book of Numbers, Numbers 13 through 14, Israel has arrived at the land for the first time, the land of promise that God was going to give them. They are here, they have arrived, what's going to happen next? So they send spies into the land. They send one spy from every single tribe, 12 in total. They go into the land and they start to look around. They see that there are mighty men in the area, there are great armies, and there are literally large people that could take them out, and so they come back and report. Ten of them say, "No way. Absolutely no way. We can't go into this land. They are too great. They are too powerful. They are too big. We stand no chance." Two of them on the other hand, say differently. They say, "God is telling us to take this land. God literally just delivered us out of the hand of the Egyptians, he literally allowed us to cross the Red Sea on dry ground. He's got our back. He will deliver us." And those two are Joshua and Caleb. And yet what does Israel do? They follow the lead of the 10. They turn tail and run. They hide away from the Lord. They failed to trust God. They forget what God had just done in delivering them and so they were forced into the wilderness for 40 years. This is their punishment. Because they disobeyed God, they failed to trust God, they are now forced into the wilderness and they wander the wilderness for 40 years, 40 long hard years.

Now the wilderness generation grumbles against the Lord constantly and forgets what he does. Even though God has constantly provided for them time and time again of delivering them from the Egyptians, delivering them from the Red Sea, and literally making food rain from the heavens for them, they forget who God is and what he has done. Now after 40 years after their punishment has been served, their sentence has been served, they arrive at the land again. This is where we're at this morning in the book of Joshua.

Now Joshua 1 starts out very difficultly for the people of Israel. Their leader, the one that had led them out of Egypt, the one that had led them across the Red Sea, and the one that had led them through the wilderness, Moses, dies which was just the worst thing that could have happened at this point. Israel has arrived, they have made it through, they have suffered through. God has been faithful. Moses has led them. Now they stand before the Jordan River. That's what's blocking them from going into the land and I'm sure what was in their mind now that they have trusted the Lord and chosen to pursue him is, "Okay, Moses led us through the sea, now he'll lead us through the river," at least that's what's going through their mind. And then Moses dies and the reader is left wondering what's God going to do? What's going to happen? Are they going to make it across? And they had to question it as well. "What do we do now that our beloved leader that has cared for us and lead us so faithfully, what do we do now that he's gone?" Moses interceded several times on their behalf and so they had to be fearful of what was coming next. They stand before the Jordan River wondering what now?

Now in chapter 1, God essentially says Moses dies, "Get up, wipe the tears off your face, you're taking the land," which would just have blown them away in that moment, right? Their leader is gone, they're ready to mourn, God says, "Get up, wipe the tears from your face, you're going and I'm going to take you there." But standing before them again is the Jordan. It's a large river and we'll see later on it's a very large river at the moment. What is God going to do? Our passage this morning is going to be actually all of Joshua 3 and then most of Joshua 4, which I know sounds like a lot but I promise it's worth it to go through all of it. So we're going to read all of chapter 3 and then a few selections out of chapter 4.

So starting in Joshua 3, hear the word of our Lord this morning.

1 Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. 2 At the end of three days the officers went through the camp 3 and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. 4 Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." 5 Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." 6 And Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. 7 The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. 8 And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" 9 And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God." 10 And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that

the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. 12 Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. 13 And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap." 14 So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, 15 and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), 16 the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. 17 Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

1 When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, 3 and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 5 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, 6 that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 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."

Then skip down to verse 15 and we'll read through the end of the chapter.

15 And the LORD said to Joshua, 16 "Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." 17 So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." 18 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. 19 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. 20 And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. 21 And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' 22 then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' 23 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, 24 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."

What a story.

Let's pray for the Lord's help this morning.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the time that you have allowed us to gather together this morning, to sing praises to your name for you are truly worthy of all our worship and all of our adoration. Lord, we thank you for allowing us to gather and hear your word proclaimed. We thank you for the story that we see in Joshua 3 and 4 that speaks of your awesome power and how you deliver your people. So Lord, help us now. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts taken, Lord, allow us to see the beauty of your word and help me as I proclaim your truth. May you be glorified, O Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So I have broken this passage down into really two different sections. We have what's going on in Joshua 3 and then tied to it Joshua 4. The two are connected. They really are kind of application driven as well in the points. So the first one, the first thing that we're going to look at and mostly of Joshua 3: step back and see what God will do. 1. Step back and see what God will do.

Now the last time like we heard just a few minutes ago, that Israel stood on the edge of the Promise Land. They responded a little bit differently than we're going to see this morning. They stood in fear and they really had two options at that moment when they arrived the first time. Option number 1, we trust the promises of God. Now Joshua and Caleb did, nobody else did. Option number 2, we run in fear and they chose option number 2, we run in fear and it didn't end up very well for them. They're running in fear. Their unfaithfulness to the Lord and their failure to trust in the Lord caused them to have to go through the wilderness for 40 years. So the first time, it didn't work out that well for them. Now I don't know if their choice to trust the Lord now was just out of fear of going back into the wilderness and saying, "We've done that, don't want to do it again. Let's try this one." Or if they were trusting the Lord. We'll see in just a moment which one it is but they saw how well it turned out last time. This time they choose, "Let's trust in the Lord and see what he can do."

But they now stand on the edge of the Jordan River. It's a powerful river that stands in their way and they are waiting to see what God is going to do, what's going to happen next. Now there are two important truths for us to see in this passage that help us better understand what God is doing. The first one is that Israel stands helpless. Now they're going to be active in this passage. They have to step out in faith, but they really honestly stand helpless before the Jordan River. There is nothing they can do about this river and a detail that we'll see later really supports why I say that. The second thing that we will see, so Israel stands helpless, God will step in. God will step in.

So our passage opens up this morning, Joshua 3:1 with Joshua. This is the man that filled in the shoes of Moses after he died. It was his job now to lead the people of Israel into the land of promise. He has filled those shoes and he gives in verses 3 through 5, three different commands to the people of Israel. Let's hear this again, verse 3 of chapter 3, "command the people, 'As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it.'" There's commands number 1. The second one, "Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." That's command number 2. "Then Joshua said to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.'" That's the third one. So if we were to put it in a little bit easier language, the three commands that Israel are given as follows, when you see the ark, follow it. When you see the ark moving, follow it. The second one is, stay back from it. Step away from it. And the third one is, prepare yourselves for what God is about to do. So when you see the ark, follow it, stay away from it, and prepare yourselves for a mighty work of the Lord.

Between chapter 3 and chapter 4, the ark of the Lord is referenced roughly 17 times. I believe it's right at 17 times. Now this is a significant and overwhelming number of times that the ark is referenced. Why is this important? What does the ark represent? It represents the very presence of God among his people. So essentially what we're seeing here is that all throughout this chapter, 17 different times the presence of God is mentioned before his people. So this chapter is soaked with references to the Lord being with his people. Now I could go a little bit further on that. Hold onto that thought, we're going to come back to it in just a second. So hold onto the thought that God is very much at work in this. Now when they see the ark of the Lord, just as they were commanded, they follow it to the river. So the ark is lifted up by the priests, it is carried to the river, and they follow it. So they are following command number 1, when you see it moving, follow it.

The second command, they were commanded to stay behind it. So their second command is you have to stay behind it, and it gives an exact distance. You have a distance of about 2,000 cubits. Now we don't use cubits today so I had to Google this. I love Google, it saves my life on a whole lot of things. I Googled it and you're looking at, if Google is correct, most of the time it is, it depends, you're looking at a little bit over 1/2 a mile's worth of distance. So they had to keep about 1/2 a mile's worth of distance between them and the ark of the Lord. They had to keep that distance.

Now why? We're going to look at the second why in just a second but the first reason that is given in this passage and the other one I'm kind of implying from this, the first reason that's given is you don't know where you're going. They had never been this way before. They had never traveled this way before. They needed to follow something. It's like their GPS. We haven't gone this way before. We don't know where we're going but God does and he's going to lead you there. Just follow him. That's the first reason, we'll look at the other reason in just a second.

The final command that they are given is prepare yourselves for what happens next. You see that in chapter 3, verse 5. Prepare yourselves for what happens next. Joshua commanded Israel. God's about to do something really amazing that is going to blow you away, something that you haven't seen in quite some time but you need to prepare your heart for it. You need to consecrate yourself for what God is about to do and it's just a complete side note, I wonder what our lives would be like if we approached worship like this, if we prepared ourselves Saturday night, Sunday morning, Sunday morning on the car right here, preparing our hearts, consecrating our hearts for what the Lord is going to do. Oh, how our affections would be stirred for him and our hearts would be stirred for him and this is my prayer for you and that's all for free. Back to the text.

Israel now approaches the water. So they followed the commands of the Lord, follow the ark, stay away from it, prepare yourselves. They've done all of those things. They are now approaching the water but Joshua, before they enter the water is going to give them some sort of encouragement and it's a really big encouragement in verses 10 to 13. Hear this from chapter 3, verse 10, "Joshua said, 'Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.'" I'm really proud of myself, I've read that twice and haven't messed up a single name. So here's how you're going to know that God is going to deliver from you all these people. All your enemies, he's going to deliver you from them. He's going to drive them out of the land. The land will be yours. Last time that they were there, they saw these people, they knew they were great, they thought they had no chance. This time, Joshua gives them an encouragement and says, "Here's how you know God's going to do it. Here's how you know he's going to drive them out."

Verse 11, "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap." So the encouragement is this, you want to know how God is going to give you the land, you want to know how God is going to drive out your enemies from the land, you're about to cross the Jordan on dry ground. He is about to stop the flowing of the water from before you. Now how is that for an encouragement? They are worried about what's going to happen next and he says, "I'm going to give you a sign. I'm going to give you something that you will know without a shadow of a doubt that I am going to

deliver you and to my promises. I'm going to send you over on dry ground." Now you would have thought that would have been sufficient for the first generation when they literally crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, but apparently that wasn't good enough for that generation. This one he's saying, "This is your sign. I am bringing you into the land and you're going to do it on dry ground."

So with that promise in mind, they head toward the river. Joshua has encouraged them. He said, "This is how you know it's going to happen." They head towards the river but at this point, so they have been active up to this point. They have been faithful to what the Lord has called them to do. They have followed his commands. They have stepped out in faith. They have been active but now they're just spectators. There's nothing that they can do except for wait and see what God will do. And what does he do at the end of this chapter? Everything that he promised. Every single thing that he promised but even greater than what they could have imagined. Israel follows the ark as commanded. They stay away from it as commanded. And they prepared themselves as commanded. It's time to watch and God delivers. He comes through.

He stops the waters of the Jordan but there is an important detail that is in your parentheses if you have it in your Bible in verse 15, "now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest." Now I would have thought that they would have thrown that detail a little bit earlier but waited towards the end of the chapter for this reason, it's to drive home the power of what God is doing, right? They are coming to the river. Now even just coming to the river in general and seeing the waters parted would be amazing but some people could approach it and say it was a drought, it wasn't that big a deal, they just crossed on a little dinky stream. This is anything but that. This is a raging torrent. The river is overflowing.

Now I come from, I spent most of the last eight years in Louisville, Kentucky. Louisville is set right on the edge of the Ohio River and every couple of years, it seems like the Ohio River is flooding, typically as the snow is melting up north, the rains are coming in the spring, it is flooding over its banks. And the last few years, I actually lived in an apartment pretty close to where the river was, about 1/2 a mile away from where the river was. A couple of, I guess it's a couple of months ago, I went out the backside of my neighborhood and that was the easiest way to get to work, but I knew that it had been raining a lot and that it was starting to flood a little bit but I wasn't expecting that half a mile away I was going to accidentally drive towards the river. So I go out the back side of my neighborhood, I was on a hill, go down the hill and I realized, okay, the river is right here and the road that I normally take is now at least 3 to 4 feet underwater. I'm going to turn around. But the Ohio River if you have ever seen it in flood level, expands to at least a mile to two miles wide and the water is so uncontrollable that it is ripping trees down like it's nothing.

This is where we're at with the Jordan. The Jordan is in flood level, critical flood level, and some have said that it can be at some points two miles wide when it is flooding. The water is flying through there. I'm sure that there was all sorts of brush and debris flowing through there. So this is no dinky stream. It is a raging river that stands before them and

the reason why it's an important detail is it shows even greater the power of God in this moment. He doesn't just stop a normal stream, he cuts off a raging torrent like it's nothing. He stops the river which has blown them away. I mean, it would have absolutely blown them away but what he is putting on display here is his immense powers and his ability to deliver his people, and just as he said, they crossed over on dry ground. They wondered if God was going to come through this time, they stepped out in faith and said, "Last time it didn't work for us when we didn't follow them, let's follow him this time." And Yahweh delivers. Like he always does, God delivers.

Now remember, I told you to hold onto that thought, the 17 mentions of the ark between chapter 3 and chapter 4. We're going to bring that back in here. Again, the ark is mentioned, the presence of God is mentioned 17 times in chapter 3 and chapter 4. Here's its significance and here's where it ties into the three commands that were given. The question we have to ask as good readers and good readers of the Bible, who is the main character of our passage this morning? Who is the main character? Now some would say Joshua, the book is named after him. We'd say, no. He is an important character but he's not the main character here. It's not the priests who were carrying the ark of the Lord. They're important. They're not the main character. It's not even Israel. You know, probably the easiest answer would be to say either Joshua or Israel by the number of times that they are mentioned. It's none of the above. The main character of this passage is Yahweh. The main focus of everything going on is God. At this point, Israel stands on as bystanders. They are spectators. And one of the greatest pieces of advice, lessons I ever learned is realizing that the Bible is not about us. Now it teaches us a lot about who we are, the problem of what we have done and how to solve that problem, how God solves that problem, but the Bible is God's revelation of himself to us. It's not about us. It's God revealing who he is, his character, his power, his glory, his holiness. He is showing us who he is, why he is worthy of worship, and it's unfolding his story of redemption, how he redeems a people for himself. So the main character of our passage this morning is God. It is Yahweh. It's mentioned 17 times. It is soaked throughout this passage that God is with us, God is at work, and God is doing something far greater than they could ever imagine. He is the main character.

Now remember the three commands that were given. When you see the ark, follow it. Here's how it ties into the reference to God throughout the entire passage. Who is leading the people of Israel into the land? It's not Moses, he's dead. It's not Joshua. It's not the priests. It's Yahweh. The only person leading Israel into the land in this moment is God and that's why the ark goes first so that they would know where they're going and so they would know the only one leading us there is the Lord.

The second thing you see is, stay back. Now there's a couple different reasons that are given, I think implied, and there's one reason I'm not convinced of. The first reason that's given, the main kind of reason that you see in the passage of why they had to stay back is so they knew where they were going. Like I said, they had no idea where they were going. They had to follow it so they stayed back. Now some people have said that the main reason why they had to stay back was because of the holiness of God. So they had to stay far away from it, and I think that that is a part of it but it's not the main reason why

they had to stay back, mostly because God never shies away from saying when his holiness is so overwhelming that you can't get anywhere near it. That's not the reason given. So they would know, first of all, who was leading them and, second of all, so they could see what he was about to do. You know, you're standing back at this point, they're not in front of the ark, they're nowhere near the river where the ark is, so they're just standing around and they're able to see what God is about to do.

The third thing that they had to do was prepare themselves. If this entire passage is thrusting toward the fact that it is God alone who will deliver them, then they have to prepare themselves to worship God because as we see in this passage, he is worthy of all of our worship and all of our praise. This passage essentially focused on the presence of God and the mighty deeds of God, what he accomplishes. Everything here is his accomplishment. It's not the accomplishment of Joshua or Israel. It is God alone who accomplishes all of these things. Dale Ralph Davis, a commentator who wrote a commentary on the book of Joshua writes this, "Thus the ark, the sign of Yahweh's presence among his people, meets us at every turn, reminding us that it is Yahweh himself who leads his people into Canaan, who cuts off flooding waters and holds them back, as it were, with his hands. The whole affair is Yahweh's feat and the Israelites though active are still primarily spectators." Israel stepped out in faith, yes, they followed the Lord, yes, but they stand as spectators at this point to marvel at what God was going to do. They stand helpless at the edge of the Jordan but God steps in and he shows his power, he reveals his glory and his plans of deliverance, and he brings it about.

Now remember that reference to Genesis 12 where God made the original promise, "I will make you a great nation and I will give a land to you." In Genesis 12, if you know this story well, when he's going to make the covenant with Abraham, he puts him to sleep and he passes alone through the sacrifice which signifies that the name of the Lord alone is the guarantee of the covenant. God guarantees the covenant alone by himself and what you see here is God alone bringing those promises to pass. God alone who guaranteed the covenant is now bringing it to pass.

Now how does this point to Christ and I think it's really important that we see this. My mentor and dear friend and old pastor, Mitch Chase, who I served with faithfully over the last few years, is always pointing his people to hear the word and it has just changed my heart and my desire towards preaching so that people would know how it all looks to Christ. And so how does this point to Christ? I think this story should sound familiar to believers. It should sound familiar to us and I think Ephesians 2 really tells that story well. We stand helpless before our sins. We stand helpless in this moment. Our sins are like the Jordan River, they are overflowing, it is a raging torrent. We have no hope of paying the price for our sins. There is nothing that we can do to fix our problem but God, Christ intervenes. He removes our sins from us through his death on the cross. He pays the price and he calls us into his eternal promises. Ephesians 2:8 through 9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." The point of all of this is to say you didn't play a part in saving yourself. You stepped out in faith and trusted him but it's

Christ on the cross that paid the price for your sins. It is Christ on the cross who stepped in and intervened and removed those sins from you.

So if you look at the parallels here. Israel had to step out in faith so also do we have to step out in faith and trust him. But we stand as spectators like Israel stood as spectators so that we could see what God was about to do. Israel couldn't part the waters. We can't pay the price for our sins. But God. But God, he steps in. He intervenes on our behalf. He stands in as our atonement, our propitiation. He is the one who pays it all. He pays the price for our sins so that we can enter his eternal promises. And so you see how these two parallel, how God steps in and delivers his people and so also does he step in and deliver us from our sins. The greatest application that we can get from this is this, Israel tried to do it their way and they failed to trust the Lord and it led them to wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, and if you lean on your own ability to save yourself, it will fail you. You can't save yourself so the question is what do you do? Remember the three commands that were given to Israel: step out, step back, prepare yourselves. You step out in faith and you follow the Lord, you trust him. The second thing you do is you watch the mighty work of salvation that the Lord will do in your life. And the third thing that you do is you fall on your knees and worship. You fall on your knees and worship.

Now God comes through in the second section of our passage this morning, looking at Joshua 4, it's going to give massive applications that would stand for all peoples at all times. So the second thing we see here in Joshua 4 is remember what God has done. So we looked at, first of all, what the Lord was going to do, step back and see what God would do, the second one is remember what God has done. Now that Israel has headed to the river, they have crossed over the river on dry ground, they are headed into the land of promise. God stepped in, he kept his promises, and he delivered them and now a new command is given to Israel in chapter 4. They were to take 12 stones from where the priests stood and bring them where they made camp. So that was their command, take 12 stones from the river where the priests stood on dry ground, take them into the land.

Now why 12? It was according to the number of tribes of Israel, one stone for each tribe which signified that God delivered all of the nation of Israel. But before we get into the bigger why of why this memorial which, I'm going to be honest, I completely did not think about the fact that our passage this morning has a memorial of the faithfulness of the Lord and today is Memorial Day. Didn't connect those two. I knew it was Memorial Day, didn't connect the dots there. Behold, our sovereign God, right? But they take the stones. But before we get to the why, we need to look at the response of the people first and then we'll look at that in just a moment.

Israel does just as the Lord had commanded them. At this point they realize, "Okay, if we just do what God says, it ends up a lot better for us so let's again trust the Lord, follow his commands and we're going to take 12 stones." They do just as they were told. They grab 12 stones and they cross over the Jordan. Now once they had crossed over, now an important note that is made here in chapter 3 and 4, is that throughout their time passing the river, they then passed the ark. They go past the ark and the ark is the last thing to leave the river which just again emphasizes that this feat was Yahweh's. So they could

turn around, see the waters come crashing back in and realize, "Okay, God has done all of this." And it's significant. It shows who accomplished it. It also, there is no turning back at this point, right? The waters have returned. The flood is back. They can't turn back anymore because I guarantee God is not going to reopen the waters because they got scared and ran. He's not going to do that. There is no turning back. At this point, you are heading to the Promise Land whether you like it or not. But at this point they have seen what God can do and they say we're going.

So they did all that the Lord had commanded them. They made camp. They took the 12 stones. They built the memorial. Now here's the why for the memorial. Why must they take the 12 stones and build a monument? I think a couple of reasons. A. So that they could remember what God had done. B. So that they could instruct the next generation of what God had done. C. So they could tell the world.

So A, so they could remember what God had done. What is the greatest threat to faith? What would you say the greatest threat to faith is? Now some might say doubt and that's a good answer but I don't think that's the right answer. I think the greatest threat to faith is not doubt but forgetfulness. The greatest danger towards our faith is forgetting what you believe, who you believe in, and who has done everything for you. For Israel, the greatest danger of their lives was forgetting what God had done for them and they did that really well and you're going to see that play out even more throughout Israel's history, how time and time again they forget what God had done for them and it leads them into sin and misery and ultimately captivity. So that was the greatest danger to faith, so what God did is have them construct a monument, a memorial so it would serve as a reminder to them all that God had done in delivering them through the Jordan and into the land of promise.

Often when you step into habits of sin because our failure to remember what God has done and we must constantly remind ourselves of the mighty deeds of the Lord, and most significantly his gospel. We need to preach his gospel to ourselves day in and day out. Every morning when we remind ourselves of the goodness of God and what he has done, it stirs our hearts toward him and we pursue him. We need to remind ourselves of the gospel every single day as it will stir our hearts and our affections toward him.

The second reason that is given for building the memorial is so that it could instruct. So the second reason is tied to the first, these two are connected here as to why they must build this monument, and it's so that they could instruct their children. Now children love questions. I am not a parent. I'm an unmarried man. I have worked with kids for many years but I was also the kid that asked a lot of questions, my favorite one being why. My parents told me to do something and I would say why. Go clean your room. Why? You need to get ready for school. Why? It was the dumbest reason, half of it was just to irritate them because I was the type of child that I was. But kids love the why question. They love to ask questions and God knowing that he made them this way to be inquisitive and want to learn, has them construct a memorial so that in the days ahead when an Israelite father is walking with his child and the child says, "What do those stones mean? What do they mean to you?" A father could say, "This is when God delivered us from the Jordan and into the Promise Land." It's so the father could instruct them in all that the

Lord had done for them and even calling back later on to seeing what God had done in delivering them out of Egypt, across the sea, now across the Jordan and into the land of promise.

Now there is an interesting parallel here with Deuteronomy 6. Deuteronomy 6:4-9. I'm not going to read it for the sake of time but in Deuteronomy 6:4 through 9, the command is given to Israel that they are to love the Lord their God with essentially every fiber of their being. So all of themselves was to love God and worship God, and then the follow-up to that command is teach your children to do this. Teach them diligently. So these two work together here, that you are to train up your children to know and love the Lord and teach them of all that the Lord has done in your life, and all that the Lord will do in their life. Remind them constantly. Take advantage of the moments. You know, questions can be annoying sometimes. You're busy, you've got all these different things to go to, you don't have time to answer a lot of questions but there are moments to train your children to love the Lord. There are moments to share the gospel with your child and what better thing could there be than your child knowing and loving the Lord for all of their days. So take advantage of the moment. Teach them to love the Lord.

Now what's interesting about those commands that are given in Deuteronomy 6 and in Joshua 4 is that they are written to all of Israel. So it's a corporate task that we're seeing unfold here. All of Israel is to invest in the next generation to know and love the Lord. Church, that's your job too. If you don't have children in this church or your children are out of the home, wherever you're at in life, your job is still to love the next generation and make much of the name of the Lord. So this is a corporate action. Families, you want other people involved. I can tell you probably dozens of names of men and women that have poured into me and invested in me and are the reason why I'm standing where I'm standing today. It was their faithfulness. And half of them didn't even have kids, wasn't related to them. It was their faithfulness to show the love of the Lord.

So it's a corporate task but it's also, this is also written toward parents. Like parents, your job is to disciple your child. You get the most time with them except for maybe school as they're growing up, but you are getting all of this time with them and the question that you have to ask yourself is do I want my child to graduate with a 4.0 or to get a scholarship or to go play professional sports, but I wasted my opportunity to teach them about the Lord, or do you want to say when they leave your home, there is no way they could say that they were ignorant of the love of the Lord. There is no way that they could say that I did not teach them all of the things of the Scriptures. Your task is to be the disciple-maker in the life of your child but these two things work in tandem, they work together for the glory of the Lord and for the betterment of your child.

So the Lord has them construct memorials so that they can teach their children and my charge to you is do the same. You don't have to go out in your backyard and build a monument of 12 stones but some of the most impactful conversations I've had with my mother and my father have been when they have told me of what the Lord had done in their lives and it served me well. It showed me who God is and reminded me in times of

trouble what he would accomplish. So make memorials and share with your kids what God has done. Share with them.

One of the things that you cannot do is assume that they know. The last thing you want to do is assume that they know. There is an old saying that says the first generation knows the gospel, the second generation assumes the gospel, the third generation distorts the gospel, the fourth generation forgets the gospel. What a terrifying place to be so let's not assume the gospel. Let's teach it and proclaim it and tell all of the mighty deeds of the Lord. May we never assume the good news of Jesus Christ and I pray that we would constantly remind ourselves and teach them daily to the next generation.

The third thing that we see here is so that they could tell the world. The reason for the stones, what do these stones mean is so that you can tell the world. The final reason which is given in verse 24, "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." These stones have a voice. They have a voice and they are crying out to the rest of the world, "This is who God is." We don't serve a small God. Let me just go ahead and burst that bubble right now. We don't have a small God that can fit in your pocket and you pull him out when you need him. We serve the God of all of the universe who created all things, who holds it in the palm of his hand. This is the one that we serve and yet he loves us and he cares for us enough to deliver Israel across the Red Sea, across the Jordan into the land of promise, and we serve a God so big that even sin and death were no match for him.

This is the God that we serve so these stones cry out to the world and they tell of who Yahweh is. They tell the world but it's also our task to tell the world. The stones stand as a memorial but it's our job to tell the world. We just heard in our Scripture reading, Matthew 28:19 through 20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded with you," and the greatest encouragement on the entire planet is Jesus saying, "I will be with you always until the end of the age." This is the God that we serve so we are called to take it out to the rest of the world. It's our job. It is our task as believers to take the gospel to our homes. It is our task to take the gospel to our jobs, to our neighbors, to our community and to the ends of the earth. It's what we're called to.

So speak of the Lord to all of the earth. He calls us into the world to tell of his mighty deeds so the question we have to ask is what do these stones mean? Three things just tied from what we just saw. They stand as a reminder to Israel and to the rest of the world of what God has done. They afford the opportunity to instruct the next generation and they tell the world that Yahweh is great and greatly to be praised.

Now I'm going to conclude with a very interesting connection that I made toward the end of my study. It's a very important detail that we can kind of pass over if we're not careful. But I think Dale Ralph Davis, author of the commentary on Joshua, and C. F. Kiel both take note of chapter 4, verse 19, "The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month." That's a really interesting and specific date. In Exodus 12:1 through 3,

hear this, "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 'This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month,' the first month, "every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.'" On the 10th day of the first month, Israel, we're going back to Exodus, is preparing to leave. The Passover is being established. You see the sacrificial lamb, the blood spread on the door posts. Israel is getting ready to go. They are preparing themselves for the deliverance that was coming from the Lord. Now we're 40 years later to the exact date, the 10th day of the first month. God started all the way back in Exodus, Israel's redemption and their deliverance and now in Joshua 4, he brings it to completion on the exact day and that should overwhelm us, the connections between the two of them. But I have something even more significant to see here, just how incredible is God's word. In Matthew 26, on the Passover, a new memorial is constructed to stand as a reminder of the mighty power of God. So in Joshua 4, they construct a memorial during the Passover to remind themselves of what the Lord would do. Matthew 26, we see the Last Supper account where they construct a memorial of all that Christ was about to do, "Take this cup, take this bread, it serves as a reminder of my blood and my body poured out for you." There is a new memorial laid out.

So in Joshua 4, the stones stand as a memorial. Now all the way in Matthew 26, we have a new memorial, all of these occurring on Passover week. In Exodus 12, the Passover for Israel is prepared, their redemption and their deliverance is being told of, it has started. In Joshua 4's Passover, the redemption and deliverance of Israel is made complete in part. In Matthew 26 and 27, the final Passover week that we need to note here, final redemption and final deliverance is accomplished for all time at the cross.

This is no mere accident. God does not have accidents when he wrote his word. It's all tied together. The Bible is one story of God revealing his plan for redemption and what he started all the way in Exodus and the very first Passover, we now stand in Matthew 26 or 27 seeing the sacrificial lamb whose blood was poured out on the altar but he stands as the high priest as well who poured it out. This is the one whom we serve. This is the Christ that we serve and we fall down on our feet and worship him because of what he has done and we cry out to him for salvation because salvation is in him alone.

Salvation has been made complete. What he started all the way back in Genesis 3 has now been made complete and we are brought into his eternal promises. God would not fail to redeem his people. He would not fail. He kept his promises and brought about a completion to his redemption story but it doesn't stop in Joshua 4, it goes on all the way to the death of Christ on the cross to the praise of his glorious name.

Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for this time that you have given us in your word. We thank you for the blessing that is your Son, that he stood where we could not stand. We couldn't pay the price for our sins and so he stepped in, he intervened on our behalf, standing as our substitute, and we are justified by faith alone through the grace alone.

Lord, we thank you for Christ's accomplishment on the cross, that what you started all the way back from the beginning of time, you made complete in his death. Salvation was made complete. We thank you that you are not a God that forgets, you are not a God that goes back on his promises but in every way you, are our God who comes through in the most amazing ways that absolutely blow us away and lead us to say, "Praise be to your name." Lord, we pray all of this in Jesus' precious and holy name and by the power of your Spirit. Amen.