

Joshua 4 | David Baumgartner

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Good morning everyone.

Happy New Year to you from my family to yours. God is good. And all the time, He is good. Well, we're going to be continuing in our study of Joshua.

So if you have your Bibles or your iPhones, please turn with me to Joshua chapter 4. We left off with the second generation Israelites actually entering the promised land.

In fact, this morning we are right in the middle of a miracle. Isn't that good news? Our text picks up with the priests in the middle of the Jordan River.

The waters of the Jordan River are divided at this point. And 2 million people have just crossed over onto dry land. Or through dry land.

[1 : 07] And at this point, Joshua receives a command from the Lord. And it's for the Israelites to do something. He wants them to do something.

Something that has lasting value that will help them in time to come. What is that? Well, this morning it's going to be a rather short message.

It's the first of the new year. And you'd think that we're just going to power ahead with all of these new ideas and wonderful things out of the gate. Actually, it's not.

We're going to be looking at remembering. Remembering the Lord. Remembering what he has done. And so, let's go ahead and read the first seven verses.

And we're going to see how this pertains to us. I'm going to look at what they were supposed to do. Why they were supposed to do it. And then how it pertains to us.

[2 : 05] And so, let's go ahead and read Joshua chapter 4, verses 1 to 7. Now, it came about when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, that the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, and command them, saying, Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet were standing firm, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging place where you will be lodging tonight.

So, Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, Cross again to the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel.

Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, What do these stones mean? Then you shall say to them, Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.

So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that we can enter this new year, but Lord, we enter it with you.

And that makes all the difference in the world. Father, we thank you that we can come here freely, and worship you, and study your word. We thank you, Lord, that you've given us your word, and you've given us each other, to encourage each other through song, spiritual songs, through hymns, also just through the ministry of your word.

[4 : 09] Lord, we need you so much today. We need you forever. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen. So the holidays have come and gone, right?

We have Thanksgiving. Boy, Jeffrey, that seems like it was just yesterday. Thanksgiving, getting ready for the parents and the daycare, and then we went right into Christmas, and then we go into New Year's, and so here we are.

I'm sure many of you have some of your favorite memories of holidays. Is that true? Yeah, you do. My wife and I lived in Colorado for about 17 years, and every other year, we would come here to St. Louis, which is our home, and we would celebrate either Thanksgiving or Christmas with our families.

And so it was a rather long drive, about 860 miles, and at that time, the national speed limit was 55 miles per hour. So it gives a new definition of the word crawl.

We would be crawling along. But I'll tell you what, brothers and sisters, it was surely worth it. You know, there was family. We got to look forward to mom's cooking, the smells of the food, just the atmosphere, memories filled with family and so on.

[5 : 37] And I'll tell you what, what a wonderful thing that is. And at times like that, don't you just want to capture those memories? Don't you want to do that? How do you do that?

Well, I think the best way is to someone to invent a time machine. You know, get in a time machine and just keep reliving those moments. But no one has done that, so the next best thing is a camera. Here, I brought one of our old favorite cameras. Actually, this was a hand-me-down for a family.

Boy, does this bring back memories. Anybody have one of these at home?

Now we have cell phones. They not only serve as Bibles, but they also serve as cameras. And so, what a thing that is to be able to take a picture and remember it.

And I know that many of you, like us, you have these albums at home, and you can look at them, and you can reminisce about those precious memories that you have.

[6 : 40] Why do we do that? Because we forget, don't we? We are forgetful people. And so, many of us have forgotten things about our families.

You know, some of the precious memories that we have, and we have these things captured, and we can see them in a photo album. Let me ask you this. What's the consequence of forgetting a family member?

Not a whole lot, because you can remember them. What if you forget something that God has done in your life? Yeah, the consequences are a little greater, aren't they?

When you forget about what God has done in your life. Friends, that's why we gather here on Sundays, is to remind each other of how precious and how wonderful our God is.

So, let's look in our text here and just see what these Israelites, what were they commanded to do by the Lord? Verse 1, if you look with me here, all the people we read had just finished crossing the Jordan, and the Lord speaks to Joshua.

[7 : 48] Verse 2, he says, appoint 12 men, one man from each Jewish tribe. And then in verse 3, we learn that each man was supposed to pick up a stone right from the middle of the Jordan River.

And they were to, this was on dry, it was dry at that point, and they were to carry it where they were staying that night. Here's some specific things to notice here. Notice in verse 3, that the Israelites, these 12 men, were to collect the stones right from where the priests' feet were.

Isn't that interesting? Right where their feet had been standing, carrying the Ark of the Covenant.

Secondly, in verse 5, notice it says that each man was to take up the stone on his shoulder.

So, apparently, Joshua's not talking about little rocks. No, he's talking about something that you'd carry on your shoulder. And then third, they were to carry them where they were staying that night.

Now, we're going to learn later that that's a place called Gilgal. And that was some 8 miles away.

So, you might want to be careful about the size of the stone that you pick up.

[9 : 00] Right? Well, why are they supposed to do that? Well, if you look with me in verse 6, it says, Let this be a sign among you.

In other words, let this be a tangible reminder of what's about to happen. And it says, It's a memorial forever.

And then verse 7, he says, Because the waters were cut off before the Ark of the Covenant. In other words, the Lord did it.

It wasn't something magical that the Israelites did. It wasn't something that these priests did. No, the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the Lord himself, is what cut off the waters.

And so, you think about that, how important that is. And so, in verses 8 to 20, we read, Everybody did as it was told. All the people crossed the Jordan.

[9 : 58] Nobody was left behind. And now, they are actually in the Promised Land. So, verse 18, the Lord tells the priests, at this point, Get out of the water.

And then we see that the waters come back, just like they had been, back to normal. Just a few notes here. If you have read along in this passage, like I've been encouraging you all this while, you may notice in verse 9, some of the English translations, the wording that is, it gives the impression that Joshua himself set up a second memorial.

In other words, that he took 12 stones himself and put them in the river where the other stones had been taken. I don't think that's a good reading. I think the best reading would be something like this. Joshua set up the 12 stones in Gilgal, the stones that had been taken in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the priests' feet were standing, who carried the Ark of the Covenant.

So, that's just one note here. Secondly, you may notice in verses 12 to 13 that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh are singled out.

[11:15] Why is that? It's actually from a previous account. It says here in verse 12 that they crossed over and battle array before the sons of Israel just as Moses had spoken to them about 40,000 equipped for war.

Now, what's that all about? Why are they mentioned? These tribes were honoring an agreement that had been made with Moses all the way back in Numbers 32.

Back then, you see, while the nation Israel was on their way to the Promised Land, they passed through this area, this nice area, that is, called Gilead.

And these three tribes said, let's settle there here in Gilead because it's a great place to raise cattle. Well, that's a good idea, but the thing is is that diminished Israel's military strength.

You see, they still had many battles to fight over on the other side of the Jordan. And so, here's the deal that the women and children would remain in Gilead, but after that, all the men would go with the rest of the nation and fight with the Canaanites.

[12:35] And then, after all the battles had been won, they could rejoin their families in Gilead. So, that's just a promise that was being fulfilled here. And we read here in verses 12 and 13, 40,000 men crossed over, dressed in battle.

They're ready for action. And you think about that, which brings us to our main section here. Israel is now in Gilgal.

And so, we kind of, we see the summary of this chapter here and what it means for us. And I see three things here. Notice here, in verse 21, when your children ask their fathers in time to come. I would say this, it's good to be reminded that is to take time for the things that are important. You know, if you're like me, you're probably like these guys who are dressed for battle, ready to go into the new year and to fight.

But no, they're not to do that. They were to, they were to, to wait for what the Lord had for them. And it's possible for us to be so busy that we would forget about what's important.

[13:55] Would you agree with that? It is. Notice here, when your children ask, we're talking here about family time. And I think it's good for parents to take the time to instruct their children.

Do you realize what a good job the Jewish culture did with this? Let me read this passage here. If you want to turn there, it's in Deuteronomy chapter 11, starting in verse 18.

The Israelites did a great job of teaching their children. Moses at this point is rehashing Israel's history. And he says, You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand. They shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall teach them to your sons, talking to them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you rise up.

You shall write them on your doorpost in your house and on your gates so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them as long as the heavens remain above the earth.

[15:08] What a wonderful exhortation for us as families to remember what's important. And it takes time to do that. You may notice in our text there's a special mention of fathers.

Any dads in here? Yeah, there's a few dads in here. We may prefer action over discussion. Maybe especially with our kids.

Again, think about these 40,000 men. Dads, when little Johnny comes with you with a question, don't say, oh, ask your teacher at school.

No, we should be able to answer those questions. How else will our family, our offspring, remember what's important to us? So the first thing is to be willing to take the time.

Secondly, not only being able to be willing, but to be able to answer their questions. Look with me here. The children would ask this. What are these stones about?

[16:12] This is back here to chapter 4. Verse 22, then you fathers shall inform your children, saying, Israel crossed this Jordan River on dry ground.

boy, I tell you what, if you have an older child today and you tell them something like this, that the Israelites passed over on dry ground, you might, that might provoke a debate because they may say, how'd that happen?

Science has proven that miracles don't happen. Yes, yeah, they do happen. I know that miracles happen, and here's how.

Look with me, verse 23. For the Lord dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God has done to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed.

Both of these incidents, the Jordan River and the Red Sea, they were miracles, friends. We parents, we may never be able to answer all of our kids' questions, but I'll tell you what, we should be able to answer this, what has God done for us?

[17:29] Amen. We should. Consider this, one man from each tribe got to pick a stone from that dry riverbed.

And then in verse 9, it tells us that Joshua set up these stones in Gilgal. That word that's used there, what means that the words were actually arranged in an orderly manner as if they were on display.

And that's because after Joshua's time, Gilgal was going to be an important place. Samuel, we read later, made it into one of the three places where he would hold a circuit court.

Saul was crowned as Israel's first king in Gilgal. And then later on, that's where he was rejected as king. The prophet Elisha made his headquarters there for a while.

Here's the main point. Jewish families could go to Gilgal and visit the memorial there. It says in verse 7, these stones shall become a memorial to your sons of Israel forever.

[18:45] Think about the World Trade Center. It's a memorial and museum for the World Trade Center. It opened in May of 2014. Did you know that there's 9,000 visitors a day at that place?

So, I wonder, the text doesn't say this, but I wonder when a family of Israelites went to Gilgal to visit this memorial, I just wonder, did each family have a specific stone that was theirs?

The dad could say, that's our family stone right there, the red one, the one that looks like a loaf of bread. And that's because my grandpa, he said he was hungry that day and he picked one that looked like a loaf of bread.

There's our family stone. It's, notice, there, it's the biggest one, the one that my grandpa picked because he only had one arm and the Lord helped him carry it for eight miles.

Here's the point. Each tribe had a heritage. Each tribe had a story. The thing is, is that Israel's memories, they're not celebrations of human achievement.

[20:05] No, they're reminders of what God did in their lives. and the Israel, the Hebrew children would listen to these stories about God's power and about his faithfulness and as they would, it would make a great difference in their lives and how they believed, what they believed, how they related to God.

They would learn there is a God and he does miracles and our God is good. He is faithful. It's not like what the science teachers say in school today.

There is a God. But here's the third thing I see here and I think it may be the most important thing. There's another audience in mind here besides the Hebrew children and I really like this because, you know, we're studying dispensations right now.

Look with me, verse 24. Most important verse. If you miss everything today, get this. Verse 24, he says, here's why they did it, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty.

Now we're not talking about just the Israelites. We're talking about all the people of the earth.

Remember last week we were talking about the Abrahamic covenant?

[21:39] What was one of the promises made to Abraham? That all the people of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. All the people.

And so we actually see here that the entire earth and the people has always been on God's radar. It's always been in the works from God's point of view.

And he says that all the people of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty. Do you know that? I believe you do.

You should if you don't. That statement is true. It's true all by itself. All the people of the earth will know that the hand of the Lord is mighty.

They will know it sooner or later. I think that statement is kind of similar to all roads lead to God. Have you heard that? That's true.

[22 : 46] All roads lead to God. But here's the question. How will he be when you get there? That's the question. That's a good question. Well here's the answer.

It's in the second part of verse 24. so that you may fear the Lord. Listen up Mike. That you may fear the Lord your God forever.

I'm picking on Mike here because he brought up this thing about there being two meanings of this Hebrew word yara, this word fear.

In fact, you may want to write this down. Exodus 20 verse 20. You'll see the word being used in the same verse in two ways. Exodus 20 20.

But notice here, two meanings of the word fear. The first one is to be utterly terrified or having a feeling of dread.

[23 : 45] And friends, this is how unbelievers respond to the things of God. To an unbeliever, you see, a memorial like this would just be a pile of rocks.

But not to us. To the unbeliever, those who are the sons of wrath, the hand of God will be mighty and it will lead to utter fear and dread.

But thank the Lord, there's another meaning here. It's that meaning of the word to be utterly amazed, filled with awe, wonder, respect, devotion, and for those who belong to him.

God's hand will be mighty. But it will be a welcoming hand. It will be a hand that is reaching out to us, reaching down to save sinners like me, like you.

And there will be a response of awe, wonder, devotion, gratitude. gratitude. How do we know this? Look at it says. Verse 24, he is your God.

[25 : 02] Is he your God today? That should be a question that we ask people. Is the Lord your God today? Because when you saw a memorial like this as a believer, it would remind you how good God has been to you.

Do you realize today the Lord provides us with two memorials? He does. And both of them are to remind us of how good God is.

What am I talking about? I'm talking about the water baptism and the Lord's Supper. We just celebrated the Lord's Supper here where we have these emblems before us where we pass them out and we remember that the Lord Jesus gave his life in exchange for sin.

He died for sin. Not his, but for ours. And by that, we are righteous. He gives us his righteousness. And then we have this water baptism. Water baptism doesn't save anybody. It's just something that we do as a memorial to recognize that we go into the water.

[26 : 20] And as we go under the water, it's a symbol of our death. But then we rise again in new life in Jesus Christ. Amen. What a public expression that is to people to see that.

And so both of these remind us of God's goodness. And it's good to be reminded. Amen. Amen. Because we're forgetful people.

We are. Yeah, I may have my camera here, but I'll tell you what. It's nothing like being able to give a testimony of what the Lord Jesus has done for me.

Do your children know your testimony? Amen. It's a good thing to share that. I want to invite the musicians back up at this point. In Dave's New Year's message, he encouraged us to rest in God's promises as we seek him daily.

And how do you do that? Remember. Remember what the Lord has done. Remember his character. Remember what all that we see about the Lord in the Old Testament.

[27 : 39] And what does it point to? It points to his goodness. That he knows us and he has made a way for us. And friends, it'll make a difference.

Not only that, if that doesn't scare you enough or encourage you enough, think about how effective the enemy is.

I'm talking about the strategies there of the devil to get us to not think about the Lord. think about how busy families are today and there's very little time devoted to things, to remembering things that are important.

Think about how virtually every public entity, schools, colleges, universities, government organizations, science, museums, they teach that there's no God. There are no miracles. miracles. But friends, we know better because we have his word, we have these accounts, and we can remember that the Lord is good.

[28 : 44] Amen? We're going to see several more memorials like this. Did you know that there's seven memorials in this book of Joshua that we're going to be studying? Well, the Israelites have more preparation to do.

Let's go ahead and stand. And let's, we'll sing this last song and let's remember, Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that we can actually read these accounts.

And to have our hearts stirred, Lord, with just the knowledge and the testimony that you are good and faithful and that you have, you had a purpose for the Hebrew nation at this time.

You have a purpose for us, Lord. And we're thankful for that. Thank you for the great grace that we find in Jesus Christ. Thank you for all your promises.

Amen.