

## **Remembering God's Hand 11-17-02**

Joshua 4:1-7; Revelation 3:2,3a; Joshua 4:21-24

*Josh. 4:1-7 (NIV) 1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." 4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."*

Last week we read of God's command through Joshua for the people to consecrate themselves because God was about to do amazing things. God stopped the water at flood stage until all the people crossed over on dry ground. God did do an amazing thing! While the River was still stopped, Joshua sent a representative of each tribe back in to the riverbed to find a rock near the Ark of the Covenant. They each carried the rock on their shoulder to the place they were going to camp that night, making a mound of stones as a memorial to the amazing thing God did.

The purpose for this mound of stones was made very clear. It was to be a sign for them. When their children passed that way and saw that mound of stones they were to relay the story of how God miraculously stopped the Jordan at flood stage to bring them into the Promised Land. They had gone from wandering in the wilderness to the destination they had looked forward to as a people for over four hundred years, six hundred if you count from the time God originally gave the promise to Abraham. God doesn't forget His promises. Those stones were a reminder not only of the great power of God, but also of God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises. Nothing can stand in the way of God fulfilling His Word.

The Jordan at flood stage can be looked at as anything that stands in the way of you doing God's will. It may be pride. Pride can keep you from humbling yourself enough to obey God's leading. Pride is such a powerful enemy that we allow it to convince us that some kind of disobedience to God is a sign of our humility. Is your Jordan desire for acceptance? We so desire to be accepted by the world that we will ignore God's leading and stay right where we are in the wilderness rather than to allow Him to part our Jordan. Whatever your Jordan is, know that God is more than capable of parting it, if you are willing to consecrate yourself to Him and follow. I often hear excuses like, "God didn't make me like that", or "that is just impossible for me". What we are really saying is God can't do in me what God in His word calls me to. "I've tried to forgive and let go but I can't. God is incapable of parting my

Jordan. Can't you see it? It's at flood stage. Why, it would be crazy to try to cross it!" You know what? You're right! Unless the presence of God goes before you and guides you, you can't do it. It comes down to who are you looking to. Self can't cross it! That's suicide. Can God make a way? Not only can He, but He already did. He parted your Jordan at flood stage with the cross of Jesus Christ! Now, will you cross over on dry ground through the victory Jesus won for you on the cross?

Once we realize it is possible, that God did make a way, then it comes down to our will. Do you really want to cross over? Do you desire to enter that scary Land of Promise inhabited by giants? Do you want to go fight the battles of the LORD? Perhaps you'd rather sit here and enjoy the manna. And saddest of all to me, are those who think the wilderness is the Promised Land. "I have all of God I want. I'm still in control of my life. I'm going to heaven because of what Jesus did, but I don't want to fight any battles for Him. I don't want to suffer in any way. I'll just stay right here. This is my promised land, my place of rest, my comfort zone. I like Laodicea!" God's heart breaks for you because He has so much more for you and we settle for the down payment!

The place they camped after crossing the Jordan was called Gilgal. Gilgal means 'the reproach has been rolled away'. If you will follow God's lead and cross your Jordan the reproach of sin, the blemish on your testimony of refusal to follow God, will be rolled away. It was forty years from the time they left Egypt to the time they entered in, to the day. There were a lot of mistakes and complaints, requests to go back, mutiny, even making an idol to lead them, but all that reproach was rolled away when they finally entered in, when they walked in the way God opened up for them, with determination to be obedient to God.

Come on over to Gilgal! Is the weight of the reproach of sin depressing you? I hear the trumpets sounding! I see the Ark moving out! Let's go see this amazing thing that the LORD is doing and believe that He will bring victory on the other side. Our reproach will be rolled away. All the failures of the past will be behind us when we step out in faith and follow God.

When God moves in our lives in a powerful way, we need to remember clearly what He did and what it meant to us. That is one way to keep dullness of spirit from invading your heart. Just recalling what He did invigorates your faith and encourages you to believe for whatever you are faced with at the moment. We need to store those experiences as vividly as we possibly can.

I have a few memorial mounds of my own. I brought a couple of very literal memorial markers to show you. The first one is this white stone. I was preparing a sermon on the letter to Pergamum from Revelation 2. The seventeenth verse speaks of the white stone upon which will be written our new name. No one else knew what I was working on. That thought had captured my mind and I just could not shake it. What will God call me? How does He see me in the destiny He has called me to? Our new names will be symbolic of our call. On the end table beside my study chair was this white stone. I asked my wife if she had put it there. She

didn't. I have no idea how it got there. I still don't know where it came from. Now that got me fired up. I felt like God was saying to me that He would see me through, help me be an overcomer. One day He will personally hand me a white stone with my new name. If that doesn't put some fire in my spirit what would? I keep that stone on my desk at home so I can be reminded of the Jordan He parted for me.

Right next to the stone is this funny little badge. That week I was working on a sermon about the love of God for each of us individually. I had taken my family to Phoenix to a mall to do some shopping for clothes. Like most of us guys, I'm not much of a shopper, so I'm thinking about the amazing love of God as we walked through the mall. My eye caught this badge upside down on the ground, and for some reason, I stopped and picked it up. When I turned it over I almost fell on the floor. "I Am Loved", it read. Wow! My eyes teared up and my heart was overwhelmed. But that wasn't all! There were three more in my family and my thoughts were about how He loved each of us individually. I shared that with my family. We walked a few more feet and there was another. I picked each one up and handed it to each member of my family. At first I was worried about who I would give the second one to, but then I knew in my heart there would be one for each of us. Sure enough there were a total of four. That's all, just four. No one else picked them up. No one else in the mall even seemed to notice them. There were no more anywhere on the floor in that mall, or on anyone's shirt. I looked. The message was obvious! We were the only ones that knew, and were thinking about His love for us individually. Those badges were for us.

Now, if you want, you can say that those experiences were just coincidences. You are welcome to think whatever you like. For me, the Jordan parted and these are my memorial markers. They are symbols of a God incident. I didn't need them. I already knew God would help me overcome and that He loved me. But He knew I needed a little more to keep me from having a dull heart. God loves to stoke our fire if we are willing to receive it. In fact, He hates it when we are lukewarm, so He helps us with little signs that encourage our faith. We need to take each one and hang on to it, turn it into a memorial mound to keep us from the dullness that is always trying to smother our zeal for God.

Romans 12:11 (NIV) *11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

We are to never be lacking in zeal. I think God gives us those God incidences to help us with that. We are surrounded with smothering, zeal dampening, fire extinguishing sights and sounds. The world does its best to put out any fires of zeal. Then there is the flesh always cringing from the zeal of God. So, God gives us some things to stir us and remind us how real our faith is.

I have had much bigger God incidents that would take too long to share: delivered and healed from a cult mentality, healed from depression when everyone forsook me in the middle of my life's greatest battle, set free from besetting sins that controlled my thought life! Those were some of the biggest Jordan crossings. The

memorial mounds are in my heart. It is a part of my testimony that God does amazing things when you are willing to consecrate yourself to Him.

When I face a new raging Jordan at flood stage, I take a stroll by those mounds. I recall why they are there and how impossible it looked back then. God will see me through this one too if I will follow His presence, if I will wait and move when I see the Ark of the Covenant move.

You have surely had some of your own. If you think about it, you will remember. That is why I keep a journal. I flag those special days when God shows up. I know He is always there, but sometimes He just gets so obvious I couldn't doubt if I tried. That is the parting of the Jordan. That is when I need to gather some memorial stones. I need to tell my children and grandchildren about those amazing times to encourage their faith. That will help them hear the same message and encourage them to watch for God working in their lives.

The Word of God should be enough for me, but I guess I'm so weak, that God has to encourage my faith with something visible like a rock and a badge. Some of the Jordan partings were quite painful experiences, but through them I knew in greater way that God is real and that He is involved in my life. He is changing me into His image. He is at work constantly dealing with each of us. How could He love us so? How could He love each of us like that? Amazing grace!

Now I want you to think about God parting your Jordan. Did you forget to set up memorial stones? Is it just a distant memory? Does it no longer grip your heart? Has the dullness of the world suffocated your fire for God, put you to sleep spiritually? The believers of Sardis had listened to the world's lullaby and gone sound to sleep. They had forgotten how God had moved and what He had said to them. They hadn't followed through on His instruction. Rev. 3:2-3a (NIV) *2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3a Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.*

Remember what you have received and heard! The world will lull us to sleep if we don't let our encounters with God keep the fire burning. That is why we need our memorial stones. Maybe some of your encounters are still fresh enough to write a note and keep in your Bible so you can remember them and share them with your children and with others. I'd like to hear more shared with the congregation. You can encourage each other's faith by sharing how the LORD met you. Do something to remember that encounter, God's instruction. As I prepared the sermon I remembered one that I have yet to act on and renewed my determination to "obey it, and repent". Have you followed through on the things the LORD has shown you?

Josh. 4:21-24 (NIV) *21 He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' 22 tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' 23 For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just*

*what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. 24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."*

You see, when you have a pile of stones, people ask questions, and then you can share the testimony of what God did. The result of that should be that they see the power of God and give Him the fearful reverence that a holy, all-mighty, and just God deserves. Before they blatantly walk into sin, they will remember that God still acts in the earth. He is still involved in our lives. I better think twice before I rebel against Him like that. And why does He want your obedience? For your good! It is just because His love desires the best for you. He wants to keep you from destructive ways.

He parted the Jordan *so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful...* It doesn't matter how wild the Jordan in front of you is. The hand of the LORD is powerful. It may look scary; it may cause you to cringe to think about stepping out in faith, but remember the hand of the LORD is powerful. God actually did this miraculous thing of stopping a raging river, and parting a Sea for His people to cross on dry ground. If He can do that, is there anything too hard for Him in your life? He had these things recorded so that you would know and have faith to believe that He can act in your life today! Your obstacle may look as big as a raging Jordan, but know that He can see you to the other side. It isn't just rhetoric. It is reality!

Remember the times God moves in your life. Mark them well. Keep the lesson fresh. Share them with your children and grandchildren. Leave them in a journal for your heirs. Leave a faith-building legacy. Leave out all the boring details about what you did and tell them about what God did in your life!

Let us take a moment and remember the last Jordan crossing we made. --- Why aren't more of our conversations about what God did and is doing? Let's start right now! Divide up into groups of 2 or 3, with someone who you haven't told about what God has most recently done in your life. We're going to take a 2 or 3 minutes for you to share briefly what God did or is doing and then we'll close with a song. If you are uncomfortable sharing what came to mind, just listen to the other person's story.