

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2021  
SERMON: REMEMBERING!  
TEXT: JOSHUA 4:1-24**

There is an ancient urban myth about Alexander the Great that goes like this:

**"Alexander the Great, one of the greatest military generals who ever lived, conquered almost the entire known world with his vast army. One night during a campaign, he couldn't sleep and left his tent to walk around the campgrounds. As he was walking, he came across a soldier asleep on guard duty – a serious offense. The penalty for falling asleep on guard duty was, in some cases, instant death; the commanding officer sometimes poured kerosene on the sleeping soldier and lit it.**

**The soldier began to wake up as Alexander the Great approached him. Recognizing who was standing in front of him, the young man feared for his life. "Do you know what the penalty is for falling asleep on guard duty?" Alexander the Great asked the soldier.**

**"Yes, sir," the soldier responded in a quivering voice.**

**"Soldier, what's your name?" demanded Alexander the Great.**

**"Alexander, sir."**

**Alexander the Great repeated the question: "What is your name?"**

**"My name is Alexander, sir," the soldier repeated.**

**A third time and more loudly Alexander the Great asked, "What is your name?"**

**A third time the soldier meekly said, "My name is Alexander, sir."**

**Alexander the Great then looked the young soldier straight in the eye. "Soldier," he said with intensity, "either change your name or change your conduct." "**

As we have been studying Joshua, we have touched on the point that we are to be "people of the present." By being "in the present," we are able to move forward more effectively to the future as we fulfill our responsibilities

that Jesus gave us in the Great Commission for “making disciples, baptizing, and teaching.” As much as we don’t dwell in the past and try to relive the past, part of our effectiveness for Jesus is the call to “remember.” Even worldly wisdom reminds us that **“those who don’t remember the past are doomed to repeat it!”**

Remembering is important to remind us “who” we are. Have you ever been so caught up in the chaos of the “now” that you almost forget who you are and what you are supposed to be doing? As Christians, we must constantly remember who Jesus is to us and what he did for us, so that we constantly remember our identity if found in Jesus and nowhere else. The world wants us to lose our identities in Christ. If we forget that we are children of God, our actions and lifestyles will very quickly degenerate, and our testimonies will be lost. Your testimony of life and identity in Christ is your primary way of leading seekers to the Lord.

In Joshua, the people have been moved to action. The two spies have returned, given their report. The people finally cross the Jordan. God once again miraculously parts the waters for the people to cross, and then Joshua tells the people to gather some stones... Let’s hear the continuation of the story in Joshua 4:1-24:

**4 When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup>“Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. <sup>3</sup> Tell them, ‘Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.’”**

**<sup>4</sup> So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen—one from each of the tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> He told them, “Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the LORD your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder—twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>6</sup> We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do**

these stones mean?' <sup>7</sup> Then you can tell them, 'They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the LORD's Covenant went across.' These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever."

<sup>8</sup> So the men did as Joshua had commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River, one for each tribe, just as the LORD had told Joshua. They carried them to the place where they camped for the night and constructed the memorial there.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua also set up another pile of twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing. And they are there to this day.

<sup>10</sup> The priests who were carrying the Ark stood in the middle of the river until all of the LORD's commands that Moses had given to Joshua were carried out. Meanwhile, the people hurried across the riverbed. <sup>11</sup> And when everyone was safely on the other side, the priests crossed over with the Ark of the LORD as the people watched.

<sup>12</sup> The armed warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh led the Israelites across the Jordan, just as Moses had directed. <sup>13</sup> These armed men—about 40,000 strong—were ready for battle, and the LORD was with them as they crossed over to the plains of Jericho.

<sup>14</sup> That day the LORD made Joshua a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites, and for the rest of his life they revered him as much as they had revered Moses.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD had said to Joshua, <sup>16</sup> "Command the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant to come up out of the riverbed." <sup>17</sup> So Joshua gave the command. <sup>18</sup> As soon as the priests carrying the Ark of the LORD's Covenant came up out of the riverbed and their feet were on high ground, the water of the Jordan returned and overflowed its banks as before.

**<sup>19</sup> The people crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. Then they camped at Gilgal, just east of Jericho. <sup>20</sup> It was there at Gilgal that Joshua piled up the twelve stones taken from the Jordan River.**

**<sup>21</sup> Then Joshua said to the Israelites, “In the future your children will ask, ‘What do these stones mean?’ <sup>22</sup> Then you can tell them, ‘This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ <sup>23</sup> For the LORD your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and he kept it dry until you were all across, just as he did at the Red Sea when he dried it up until we had all crossed over. <sup>24</sup> He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the LORD’s hand is powerful, and so you might fear the LORD your God forever.”**

The fourth chapter of Joshua reminds us that a basic component of life is that a hope for the future is based on the memories of the past – which helps bring meaning to the present.

### ***Memories are important!***

Our church, the gathered body of believers is not an institution but rather a growing, living, organic entity, often characterized as a plant of some type. The individuals who make up the church need to be cared for. We need to feed from the Bread of Life, we need to drink from the Living Water. If we are to be active, healthy, growing believers in Jesus we need to be rooted in good soil. Memories are the nourishing soil that our proverbial roots sink down into and keep us firmly planted. We learn from our memories, and this allows us to live and do ministry in creative new ways for Jesus Christ.

As you actively engage in life and ministry, you will soon realize that living as Christians means that we need to stay grounded and balanced as we walk the tightrope of life. We can tend to be creatures of extremes...extreme actions, extreme emotions. We need cultivate balance and not extremes when we engage in life and ministry.

What's an example of this? In our churches we can be such defenders of faith that we forget that we are dealing with people and lose the spirit of love and compassion that Christ showed all those who came to him. On the flip side of this, we can be so concerned with showing kindness, acceptance, and love, that we ignore the truths of scripture than cannot be forgotten.

In this chapter of Joshua, we are reminded that those who have a relationship with God also have a future with God. That future gives hope as we live and serve in the present. Joshua reminds us that God understands that at times we lose our focus on what matters and become preoccupied with the demands and chaos of today. God, in his love and understanding, creates memorials or reminders that help keep our focus on our true foundation.

## MEMORIAL STONES

In chapter 4 of Joshua, Joshua and the people have crossed into the promised land. God, once again, miraculously parts the waters of the Jordan river so the people cross on dry land. After they arrive on the other side of the river, God instructs Joshua to get twelve men, one from each tribe, to go back into the riverbed and gather twelve stones. They will carry these stones to Gilgal, where they will settle for the time being. These twelve stones will then be arranged into a lasting memorial this miraculous crossing.

Joshua, himself, set up twelve stones in the very middle of the Jordan, at the place where the priests, bearing the ark of the covenant, had stood.

After all the people were in the promised land, Joshua told them why the memorial was significant. Future generations would ask about the stones and they would be told the story of the parting of the waters, and they would be reminded:

**24 He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the LORD's hand is powerful, and so you might fear the LORD your God forever."**

Baptists are people of symbols which act as memorials. Over the years I have run into those who were against certain symbols and it caught me off guard. Several times I have had encounters with individuals who don't believe churches should have crosses in them. Somewhere in their lives, they have been taught that crosses were "graven images." For Baptists we don't worship a cross but remember the one who died on the cross and rose again.

There is a place for memorials. The Bible contains multiple examples: Noah's rainbow, circumcision as a sign of the covenant, Moses' sister Miriam, who wrote a poem about the crossing of the Red Sea which was used repeatedly in our religious history, the ark of the covenant, the temple in Jerusalem, a cross, an empty tomb, baptism, gathering around the Lord's Table. All of these things remind us of our roots and our foundation.

What are the memorial stones of your life? What are some of the memorial stones that ground us, comfort us, and bring us closer to Jesus?

### **1. *Place***

Are there places in your life, that when you visit them, bring you closer to God or remind you of what is truly important in your life? From many, it is the church where you were baptized or grew up. It might be a grandparent's home, or a beach you would visit. So many places that remind us of what is important. May we seek to make this House of God a place that will be a memorial stone to many and a beacon of God's truth and love to all who are seeking.

### **2. *People***

Hebrews 12:1 reminds us:

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.**

How many people in your life can you name who have been influential in your life and your spiritual growth? May we strive to be a memorial stone to those around us. May we take the time to invest our lives into the lives of those who are beginning their journeys and who are seeking to understand what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

### ***3. Experiences***

What has happened in your life that has shaped your beliefs? Memories of events that you go back to again and again. The experiences might be positive, and they might be negative. Negative experiences, as painful as they were at the time, can truly remind us how God worked in our lives. How He walked beside us and brought us peace and comfort. This is why the testimonies from everyday individuals are so powerful. They are memorial stones of God's love and presence in our lives.

### ***4. Physical Gestures***

You have heard the saying "***it's the little things that mean the most***"? It is so true. Physical gestures can be powerful memorial stones. Emotionalism in a church can be a turn off for some but so can a church that is strictly cerebral can drain our spiritual experience of any emotion and feeling. It is that "balance on a tightrope" that we are experiencing once again. We impart truth and fact, absolutely, but we also are invited to lift our hands in praise and worship. We decorate at times to create a worship space that will enhance our communion with the Lord.

### ***5. Mementos***

God can use those items that seem to be cluttering our homes and churches as memorial stones in our lives. God knows how our brains tend to function. We fill photo albums, we scrapbook, we save memories in boxes. These items are taken out and gone through and they serve as triggers of memories that bring floods of emotions back to us. The stones that Joshua and the people erected served in the same way. It was a lasting memento of God's power and goodness.

## **6. The Bible**

The Bible is very much a book of memories and so much more. The Bible is not to be worshipped, only God worthy of our praise, but the Bible is very much God's truth as seen through teaching and historical account of how God works for and in His children. When we ignore the reading of scripture, we run the risk of falling away from our relationship with God.

### **WHAT DO MEMORIAL STONES MEAN TO US?**

To be perfectly clear, our memorial stones hold no mystical powers – but they point us to the true power for our lives – ***the crucified and risen Lord!*** At times we can be so busy trying to get God to do things for us that we forget our primary responsibility of achieving what God wants us to do. What is the significance of memorial stones of Gilgal and our own memorial stones?

- 1. We remember the wonderful works of God yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We are reminded as we live our lives that God is continually at work.***
- 2. We have a bad habit of forgetting what God has done.***
- 3. We are reminded to be thankful.*** When was the last time you said “Thank you, Lord,” in the midst of an impossible situation?
- 4. Memorial stones remind us of how God works in the lives of others, not just our own lives.*** We are reminded of the greater working of God in our world and in the lives of those around us and we become even more connected as the family of God.
- 5. For future generations.*** Joshua's stones weren't just for Joshua's generation. God knew that this generation would have children and their children would have children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren and these descendants would see the memorial stone and be reminded of the powerful miracles of God.
- 6. Memorials can be simple.*** The remembrances we have and leave for future generations do not have to be complex and elaborate. Simple stones from

a river, water from a baptism, bread and grape juice at the Lord's Table. God takes the insignificant and makes it significant.

**7. They remind us that we are part of a community.** We are meant to be gathered as the people of God. The very first verse of chapter 4 tells us that the memorial stones were arranged after "all the people" had completely crossed over the Jordan. Today there is a push in some groups to have us believe that we can worship God without being the church. That we can be effective alone. God can certainly use us, but he created his church to be in community for the greatest results. Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us:

**<sup>12</sup> A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.**

Take some time this week to examine your memory stones. Let the memories fill you with praise and thankfulness for the goodness of our God. Remember your identity given to you by Jesus. You have been adopted into the family of God. Your big brother is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. He loved you so much that he willingly went to a cross to take away the punishment you deserved, and he has given you purpose within the kingdom of God. Remind yourself about who God is, who you are, who others around you are, where you have come from and where your future lies.

Let's pray...