



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

A Memorial to God

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Joshua 4

Clint Pressley

*When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup> "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, <sup>3</sup> 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.'" <sup>4</sup> Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' <sup>7</sup> 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."*

*<sup>8</sup> And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there. <sup>9</sup> And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day. <sup>10</sup> For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua.*

*The people passed over in haste. <sup>11</sup> And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people. <sup>12</sup> The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. <sup>13</sup> About 40,000 ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. <sup>14</sup> On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.*

*<sup>15</sup> And the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>16</sup> "Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." <sup>17</sup> So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." <sup>18</sup> 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.*

*<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. <sup>21</sup> And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup> then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' <sup>23</sup> 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, <sup>24</sup> 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."*

*(Pastor prays)*

As I sit at my desk in my office, I can lift my eyes and see a gold cross on top of a staff that stands about seven feet tall. It's tucked into the corner, and etched lightly into one beam of that brass cross is the name Clinton Century Pressley, my grandfather. It was carried in procession every Sunday of worship in Saint Andrews Episcopal Church. Behind me in my office is a trifold American flag in a wooden frame that was draped across my other grandfather's coffin. He fought EL Duce' and the Nazis in WW2.

These are memorials that remind me of where I come from and keep me focused on where I'm going. We need memorials as Christians because we are prone to forget. First there is amnesia then apathy and finally apostasy. And that fact that God would give 24 chapters of text describing the people of Israel crossing the Jordan and then memorializing it indicates the value that this has for believers.

This passage reminds us that the wonderful works of God are worth treasuring in our memories. This reminds us that we are prone to forget. This reminds us that remembering the past and how God works makes future problems smaller. This is not nostalgia. Nostalgia is a liar. A memorial makes us pause and look back and gain strength to move forward. God's works of salvation must be perpetuated in the memory of coming generations. All history is God's history.

### **God's History has a Purpose**

This chapter is long. I'd like to take a few minutes to walk through it and then come back and draw out a few lessons. In verse 1 we see that the nation of Israel had finished passing over the Jordan. In verses 2-4 we see that there are 12 men from 12 tribes that are told to take 12 rocks to the other side of the river. In verse 6 we see the reason for that memorial will be the question the children will ask: what do those stones mean to you? And verse 7 tells us the

answer: That you will tell the children that the water was cut off and the people passed over on dry land and this memorial is left to help remember. Verse 8 tells us that the people quickly obeyed. And in verse 9 we see Joshua building another monument in the middle of the river where in verse 10 we learned was the central place of the Ark during the crossing. Verses 12-13 tell us of how these sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh led the people through the Jordan. Verse 14 tells us that Joshua received the status of Moses with the people. In verse 18 the priests come out of the Jordan and the river goes back to normal. And in verse 20 the 12 stones taken from out of the Jordan are set up at Gilgal. Verses 21-23 show generational discipleship as the children are taught that the same God who dried up the waters of Jordan is also the Lord who dried the Red Sea when Israel passed over from Egypt. God is the same today as He was yesterday and is always. And finally verse 24 tells the purpose of the memorial: so that all the people will know how mighty is the Lord and that so you may fear the Lord your God forever.

What are the lessons about God?

### **God is to be trusted**

In verses 5 - 6 Joshua gives the reason for the memorial: That this will be a sign among you. It is a sermon in stone. Not like Stonehenge or the pyramids that might be worshipped but a reminder of the goodness and the power of God exercised on their behalf at the Jordan. It is a pledge of what God will do. We have memorials in baptism and the Lord's Supper that remind us today. God is to be trusted.

### **God is to be known**

You see it in two questions about the children seeing the stones. In verse 6 and also again in verse 22, Joshua tells the people what they are to teach the next generation. What does this mean? It is very similar to the instructions found in Deuteronomy 6 after Moses had given the 10 Commandments to the people in the *shema*. It's found in Exodus 12 with the Passover. It's teaching the next generation of who this God is, how He works and how He saves. Remember first there is spiritual amnesia, then apathy where you don't care anymore, and then comes absolute apostasy. Churches that stray from the Bible produce disciples who quit. It happened in Judges when everyone did what they thought was right in their own eyes. God is to be trusted. God is to be known.

## **God is a God of grace**

God is a God of grace found through Jesus. Here in the content is what they are to teach in verse 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."*

It is all God-based on His grace and not the people's faithfulness. There is another reminder of how different our religion is in the 5 Solas which say: There is **grace** alone through **faith** alone in **Christ** alone from the **scripture** alone to the **glory of God** alone. God is to be trusted. God is to be known. God is a God of grace.

## **God unifies His people around mission**

We are unified to the call of one mission. Matthew 28, Go and make disciples.

You see the unity in verses 1-2 and again in verses 12-13. In verses 1-2 you have Israel which is one nation, but notice the instructions: Take one person from each tribe to pick up a stone and put it on his shoulder.

So you have 12 people from the 12 tribes of Israel with 12 stones. They come up on the other side of the Jordan and put them in one pile and make one memorial. You have one mission. And also in verses 12-13 we see those three stray tribes of Rueben, Gad and half of Manasseh. They are going to be on the other side of the Jordan. They have come and joined with the rest of Israel, a unified nation moving forward. What we see is that the centrality of God's work holds people together. And any deviation from the central work of God in our time always threatens our unity around the cross of Jesus. God unifies His people around mission.

## **God sustains us when things get terrible**

I got strangely obsessed with verse 9 this week. It's indicating something unusual. There is some debate, but let's go to the plainest reading. . <sup>9</sup>*And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.* Joshua made a second memorial in the river. It would be a hidden memorial in the Jordan that you couldn't see at all during flood stage or even when the river was at the normal stage. This memorial in verse 9 you couldn't actually see until the land was in a drought and the rain had not fallen and the place feels like a desert. The fig trees aren't blossoming and no grapes are on the vines. The fields yield no food and there is no herd in the

stalls. Joshua could go back to Gilgal and look out over the placid waters of the Jordan and see how the river had dropped low enough to expose those stones and there he could remember and he could rejoice in the Lord. He could take joy in the God of his salvation. He could remember those memorial stones and those markers are still in place.

We have memorials that help us remember, we have wedding bands and college rings. I have moleskin notebooks with journals of years past. I have a little blue Bible that got me through a hard time, and in my carport I have an original pew from the first church that I pastored. Those memorials showed God's faithfulness and His provision. They show His love and His care. God is to be trusted. God is to be known. God is a God of grace. God unifies us on mission. God sustains us when things get terrible.

### **God is to be shared**

What God does we don't keep to ourselves. Let's go to verse 24. <sup>24</sup> *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.* So that is there to tell us what we are to do now. So that all the people of the earth may know.

Your life has an evangelistic element to it. All that you walk through, good and bad, shows the outside world that your God *does* things. Look, it's been a hard week. I got notice that one of our church members Graham Harris had died; 45 years old with three beautiful children and now a grieving new widow. As providence would have it, Kyler and I were there when they brought Graham's body out of the house. We stood there in the yard with 50 or so neighbors. And his wife and all of her Christian friends were singing a hymn as they were bringing him out. As they were planning the funeral and gathering for a private viewing and then at the funeral as the family wept and prayed, we watched that family lift off the name of Jesus in the midst of that terrible time. This is evidence that this God is *powerful*. This is evidence that

### **God is to be worshipped**

Verse 24 again, fear the Lord your God forever. He is to be heralded. This God is good. He loves His people. He saves those who aren't worthy, and He does it at the cross of Jesus. God's history has a purpose. We call it providence. Providence is God bending the arc of your life, hard providence, smiling providence, to see Jesus. God is faithful. God is to be trusted. God is

powerful. He is to be worshipped. God is to be known in Jesus. I want you to know him and love him and to celebrate all God is doing in your life.

*(Pastor prays)*