

**The Rock: 05-30-2021****Memorial Day**

**First reading: None**

**Title:** Monument moments

**Scripture:** Joshua 4

**Theme:**

Why is it good to remember? History and the past are important. It is how we learn what to do and not to do as we go and grow forward.

**Introduction:**

Winston Churchill, addressing the House of Commons in 1948 said:

“Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”

While it is not my normal routine to stop and take time to talk about why a Memorial Day is important.

Given these past 15 months, I feel it is good to do so. Not simply because our nation is at genuine cross-roads, but the Church is trying to find her footing in it all. Remember from last week: We are made for this.

There are so many reasons why what Sir Winston Churchill said is true, and many reasons why in our growing forward, post-pandemic and into a new season as a community of believers we should understand our mission in this world and the message we have.

We should never forget, never avoid, and most certainly never cancel out the offensive and the hard things of history. That is far too dangerous a road to go down.

Deep and true lessons are lost to time if we do so, and eventually, as anyone who sees history as it has unfolded will testify, we are condemned to repeat its mistakes.

The beauty of the Bible is that it does none of those things. Anyone who has picked up this book and genuinely studied it knows that it contains the good, the bad, and the ugly of God's people navigating this world.

### **The Story:**

In 1864, a small group of women from PA decided to place flowers on the graves of all the men who died in the battle of Gettysburg.

The following year, women from MS did the same thing in a quiet ceremony honoring

the memory of those who fell at Vicksburg.

Two years later another group of women (are we seeing a pattern here?) laid flowers on the graves of both the Union and Confederate fallen.

At the same time in IL, 219 Civil war vets marched to Woodlawn cemetery to honor the fallen of the war which had divided this nation some 8 years before.

A nation divided, angry, and demanding to be heard. To have human beings honored and validated as human, and sorting out just how much power the Federal government should and shouldn't have.

All good things that for the Christian, should always be tackled from the Biblical framework FIRST -not political party leanings and personal preferences.

So, how far have we come as a nation? Can we, do we reflect on our history and learn from our mistakes? Do we celebrate our victories?

Anyway, just some thoughts as we look at Joshua and the people of Israel on this Memorial Day weekend. Asking the questions: What is a monument moment? Why is it important in our growing forward?

Joshua, the man who took over for Moses as the people of Israel were finally ready to enter the promised land after 40 years of wandering because they had forgotten God's promises and all the things He had done for them in the past.

If we remember back, Moses was the one whom God sent to deliver the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land. I leave this with you to read for yourselves (Starting in Exodus 12).

But Pharaoh being Pharaoh would not let God's people go, and as a result the plagues of Egypt occur until Pharaoh decides its best to free these people.

The Israelites then get to the edge of the promised land, and Moses sends in 12 spies, two of whom are Joshua and Caleb, to scope out the land.

Remember, God has promised this land to them. Yet when they come back from their mission, this is what we find:

"At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit

of the land. And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

**-Numbers 13:25-29 ESV**

But there ends up being a problem here, because the reports, or I should say, the perspectives were very different. Because Caleb one of the spies, speaks up:

"But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."

**-Numbers 13:30 ESV**

You see, Caleb saw the same thing the others did. But he remembered. Remembered what? The promises of God and the deliverance of God.

He saw what was in front of him not in relation to the situation, but rather in relation to his God and his faithfulness in the past. What had gone before.

Long story short, the negative nellys win the day. Joshua and Caleb lose the argument and the people of Israel are condemned to wander for 40 years in the desert until that generation died.

Sad really, as they could have inherited the promised land so much sooner if they had just remembered God and his faithfulness, and stepped out in faith. Instead, they were overcome with fear because of what their eyes saw.

The Church here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is at that crossroads as well. Most especially here in America. Memorial Day is a day we remember those who have fallen in order that we may have the freedoms and more importantly the liberties we enjoy.

But we also need to remember this: As Christians, we are only Americans best, if we aren't Americans first. Why?

Because as Christians, we should never lean on systems and governments as the end all support and guarantee of our right to exist. We must remember who we are, and who has called us.

The Church was called into being with power, as we learned last week. That means kingdoms and nations will come and go, and no matter how bad it may look for

the Church along the way, she has always risen up to out-live her pallbearers.

Every nay-sayer who has declared the death of the church or the people of Israel for that matter, have been tossed upon the ash heap of history.

If we remember what the People of Israel were to remember, we will find that it is God alone whom we serve, and all of His promises given to us are already yes in Christ:

"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

#### **-2 Corinthians 1:19-22 ESV**

Long before Jesus became that fulfillment, all of the promises of God were still yes and amen. So when the people of Israel, standing again at the edge of the Jordan river forty years on, God's promise to work on their behalf

still stood. They just needed the faith to believe.

This time they didn't look at the size of the problem. Instead, they remembered the promises of God. The water parted just as it had at the Red Sea, and the people crossed into the promised land on dry ground.

Let's look at Joshua four:

"When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, 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.'" Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 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..."

**-Joshua 4:1-5 ESV**

What is happening here? A monument moment! You see 40 years prior, the



people failed to remember! To remember that it was God who delivered them miraculously, by the hand of Moses His servant through the Red sea.

All they saw when the spies gave the report was how big the problem in front of them was, forgetting entirely how awesome and big the God who delivered them IS.

Not this time though. Forty years of wandering in the desert will reframe your focus. This time Joshua is having them build a monument to this victory. He does not want them to forget again.

He declares it a monument to the LORD and what He has been so faithful to accomplish for them.

"...that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 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."

**-Joshua 4:6-7 ESV**

Now, whoever wrote this account, tells us in verse 9:

"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 4:9 ESV**

Why? Because it is absolutely essential to remember, that's why. Human beings are so quick to forget, and sadly as followers of Jesus, we too can be and are actually very quick to forget.

It seems when trouble hits, instead of falling on the memory we have of the faithfulness of God, we are overcome with our circumstances.

If we have nothing to go back to and reflect on, we stew over our current situations and circumstances, leaving us feeling alone and hopeless.

God never calls us to this! We must remember, if ever we are to grow forward in a healthy and successful way.

Never to glory in the good ol' days, although God's faithfulness is always good to celebrate, but to be filled with the hope we have because of His constant faithfulness, and launch forward.

Our founding documents actually demanded, even indirectly, that the Civil War, as horrific as it was, happen.

Why? Do your research, and you will find that People like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards pre-revolution spoke out against the institution of slavery.

Our founding fathers understood that this issue would need to be addressed or our nation would not last long. The racial divide was very present in front of them.

They argued and owed that they had neither the answers or the ability to tackle it. But the truth will out as it always does, and built within our founding documents the following:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident (clear in nature itself), that all men are created equal..."

That statement demands to be addressed, not eliminated.

You see, when we recognize that God is the one who gives genuine freedom, that it is God who delivers us from and all things, it is God, in Christ who forgives us and sets us on solid ground to live and to act and to work in His good world, being the voice for the poor, the widow, the foreigner among us...

Remembering that He alone is the one to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance, will help us to remember rightly and understand that He has delivered us and He will keep us.

Monument moments in your life, what are they? Where are they? How do you remember them? How do you share them with your children? How do you hold onto them?

I said once before in a message last year, quoting Spurgeon, that if God has delivered us six times, why wouldn't we trust Him to deliver us a seventh?

For me, it is that shortsightedness of human nature. It is the forgetfulness of my heart, and I suspect it is the same for you also.

We remember! For us as Christians we remember God's call and his promises. In my Bible on page 596 is verse 25-26 of Psalm 37, one of my favorites.

Here is what those verses say:

"I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing."

**-Psalm 37:25-26 ESV**

A monument moment for me. I remember working my way through my schooling while working and helping to raise 4 kids, there were times when things were more than tight.

Anemic I would say, and what I had at those moments were God's promises and His faithfulness. Right here in Psalm 37.

I got up every day and got to work believing God had called me to certain things and that his word would always prove to be true, and He would be faithful.

At the bottom of the page in my Bible I wrote this:

"I have seen this promise fulfilled over the years of my life. 'I have been young, and now I am old...' 35 years I have seen God's hand of faithfulness."

Again, a monument moment. A reminder of His promises to me and His faithfulness in all circumstances, even when there were times when I doubted.

How about you? This Memorial Day, when we remember those who sacrificed so that we can be free. What monument moments have you written down, and enshrined in your heart to remember?

So that the generations after you will remember. I have the deep privilege of being a Dad to four kids and a papa to five grandchildren. These are the things I try to share, so they remember God's faithfulness.

You see, this is why those stones from the middle of the Jordan river were so very important for the people of Israel. Joshua said to the people after they had been set up:

"When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' 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, 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."

**-Joshua 4:21a-24 ESV**

3,500 years on, we remember.