

The Meaning of the Twelve Stones

Joshua 4:1-14

This passage comes after the crossing of the Jordan River. God tells the people of Israel to place twelve stones along the river to never forget what He had done for them. The Israelites needed to do much after crossing the Jordan River. They needed to get back into battle formation and prepare for war. But more than that, the people of Israel needed to remember that God was the one who had led them across the Jordan River.

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.’” (Joshua 4:1-3)

There is a saying that says to let personal bitterness leave you like water flowing down a stream but to remember the blessings you have received like an engraving on a stone. However we do the opposite. God wants us to never forget what He has done for us. When the Israelites forget the grace of God, He spoke a powerful word of warning through the prophet Hosea.

And the Lord said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” (Hosea 1:9)

We must remember what God has done for us. I hope that we can be a people that never forget.

The reason the Israelites set the twelve stones in place was to signify that God had promised the Israelites that He would take care of them in the land of Canaan.

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 4:22-24)

God is a God that begins a good work, and He is also a God that sees it through to completion. It was already in the plan of God that the Israelites would enter into the land of Canaan. But just because they entered the land did not mean God would leave them alone, He would continue to form and shape them in the land of Canaan.

Before entering the Canaan, God took care of the Israelites. When they were in the wilderness for 40 years, God sent a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire to lead them. He made water come out from a rock when they were thirsty and had manna and quail fall from the

sky when they were hungry.

That is the same God that helped them cross the Jordan River and gave them a reason to set the stones in place.

To be honest, there was no reason that Joshua and the people of Israel should receive the blessings they did from God. In fact, when you think about how the Israelites acted and their sinfulness in front of God, instead of blessings they should have received curses. But the Israelites did do one thing right. And that one thing was their obedience.

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. And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the Lord and the priests passed over before the people. (Joshua 4:10-11)

In order for three million Israelites to cross the Jordan River, the priests that were holding the ark would have to stand in the middle of the River the entire day. It must have been extremely difficult, but the priests did not move at all. It was only after everyone had crossed that God allowed the priests to cross and the waters to crash back down.

It was the spiritual leaders, the priests, who were completely obedient to God.

When you are obedient, what happens?

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. (Joshua 4:14)

Joshua became a great man through God. Even if you are insufficient God will raise you up to be more than enough, He will make you great. Joshua was able to accomplish everything He did simply because he obeyed the word of God. If the leader is obedient, then the entire community that follows him will have the same heart. Everyone will unite under the word of God. If we as a church become one by being obedient to God, that obedience will lead to a spiritual revival.

And what is the last thing we must remember?

It is not enough for us alone to know, we must pass it down to our children.

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)

What is the best way to teach them?

We must show them.

Our children will see our spiritual life and experience the same joys and thanksgivings that we experience. We are able to show them how our lives are transformed after meeting Jesus and what joy is as we grow in our relationship with God.

Also, you must lead your children in faith constantly through repetition. This teaching is not temporary and it is not quick.

Let's look at verses 19 and 20.

'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. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.' (Joshua 4:19-20)

The stones were set in two different places. The first was in the Jordan River right at the riverbank. The second was at Gilgal.

And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' (Joshua 4:21)

The reason God had the Israelites set the stones in two different places was so the next generations would be constantly reminded and retaught what happened at the Jordan River and how their forefathers entered into the Land of Canaan.

This is the same for us.

It is not enough for us to simply show our children who God is through worship and prayer, we must constantly teach and repetitively guide them in their spiritual walk. Why we need to go to church every Sunday, why it's important to give tithes and offerings, and why we pray every morning needs to be shown, yes, but it also must be directly taught by us to our children.

The Talmud says this,

'Foolish parents give their children wealth, sensible parents give their children knowledge, but wise parents give their children faith.'

My brothers and sisters,

What will you give your children?

I hope that we can lead our families well, that we would show and teach our children through constant repetition what it means to love God. Do not forget what God has done in your life, remind yourself just as the Israelites did with the twelve stones, and pass those down to your children.

Sharing Time_____

1. Even though the Israelites did not deserve God's blessings, it was through their obedience that God led them through the Jordan River into the Promise Land. As 2018 starts, how will your goals for this year show your obedience toward God? Please share.
2. The twelve stones were placed so that the Israelites would not forget that God was the one who led them through the Jordan River. What are the things that we hope our children will never forget?
3. What part of this message spoke to you the most? Share with one another.