

## **Making Memorials**

### **Discussion Notes - May 25, 2026**

1. What is the most meaningful memorial, tradition, or keepsake in your family, and why does it matter to you?

In "Making Memorials," the sermon builds on the weight of Memorial Day to introduce a bigger idea: God doesn't waste our experiences, He reassigns their meaning. The message walks through three kinds of memorials God leads His people through. Memorials of triumph, like the twelve stones Joshua placed after crossing the Jordan, are built so that future generations will have something to point to when they need faith. Memorials of brokenness, like Psalm 51, show that God can take the lowest points in a person's life and transform them into worship that blesses others for generations. Memorials of sacrifice, seen most fully in the cross, demonstrate that God can take what the world considers shameful and foolish and redefine it as the ultimate display of power and grace. The invitation is to stop sitting on a pile of unresolved experiences and instead bring them to Christ, who alone can make sense of the senseless, find meaning in the meaningless, and create purpose from what feels like waste.

#### **Read Joshua 4:3, 6 (ESV)**

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

When God commanded Joshua to pull twelve stones from the bed of the flooded Jordan River, He was designing a monument for people who weren't yet born. The Jordan was at flood stage when Israel crossed. This was a miracle impossible to miss. Those stones were picked from the very spot where the priests stood holding the Ark while an entire nation walked through on dry ground. The memorial wasn't for the people who witnessed the crossing; it was built so that the next generation, and the one after that, would have something concrete to point to and ask about. God embedded the testimony into the landscape on purpose.

2. Is there a story of God's faithfulness in your own life that you have kept largely to yourself, that God may be calling you to share as a memorial for someone else who needs it?

#### **Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (ESV)**

*"And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

Just before Israel entered the Promised Land, Moses delivered a series of speeches urging the nation to actively remember what God had done over forty years in the wilderness. This was not nostalgia, it was preparation. Moses understood that the abundance of the Promised Land would bring new temptations and tests, and that the people would need to draw on the memory of God's faithfulness to stay anchored. The manna itself was a built-in memorial lesson: God fed them in ways they could never provide for themselves so they would know, beyond argument, that their lives depended on His word and not their own resources. Moses called Israel to intentionally rehearse God's faithfulness as preparation for future challenges rather than as a response to past ones.

3. What is one practical habit (journaling, a prayer rhythm, a physical object, a regular conversation) you could build into your life to make sure you are actively remembering what God has done before the next hard season arrives?

### **Read Lamentations 3:19-23 (ESV)**

*"Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

The book of Lamentations was written in the immediate aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction by Babylon; one of the most catastrophic events in Israel's history. The author does not soften or spiritualize the pain; he names the affliction specifically, calling it wormwood and gall. But in the very act of pressing into the memory of suffering, he stumbles onto something deeper: the steadfast love of God that has not moved. This passage shows that making a memorial out of brokenness doesn't require pretending the pain wasn't real. It means being honest enough about the darkness that you eventually find God's faithfulness still standing on the other side of it. The sermon says we each have a choice about what kind of memorial we make from our experiences. Triumph can become worship or pride, brokenness can become humility or bitterness, and sacrifice can become purpose or waste.

4. Do you think that reframing is always within a person's control? What makes it genuinely harder for some people than others, and what role does community play in it?

### **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)**

*"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

Paul is writing to a church in Corinth, a prosperous Roman city where power, status, and eloquence were the highest cultural values. In that world, crucifixion was not simply a method of execution; it was a deliberate mark of the lowest possible social disgrace, reserved for criminals and slaves. The claim that this symbol of ultimate failure was actually "the power of God" would have been jarring to the point of offense. Yet this is the sermon's climactic example of God reassigning meaning: the cross began as a Roman memorial to humiliation and became the central memorial of all human history- a curse redefined as grace, a death redefined as life. The cross is the ultimate memorial. God took the most shameful symbol in the ancient world and made it the defining sign of salvation.

5. As you think about your own life, what is one experience (a failure, a loss, a season of brokenness) that you are willing to hand to God this week and ask Him to reassign its meaning?

### **Prayer Points**

- Gratitude for the specific moments in our past where God proved faithful, even when we doubted He would.
- Courage to share our own memorials - our testimonies - with the people around us who need to hear them.
- Surrender of the unresolved experiences we have been carrying, trusting Christ to redefine their meaning in His time.

## DEEPER DIVE: JOSHUA - A Life of Remembrance

Joshua is one of the most compelling figures in the Bible when it comes to the discipline of intentional remembrance. Called to lead a generation into a land they had never seen, he carried the weight of collective memory on behalf of an entire nation. He had been present at the Exodus as a young man, had survived forty years in the wilderness, and had watched an entire generation die before reaching what they had been promised - largely because they failed to trust what God had already done. When Joshua finally led Israel across the Jordan, he understood something the previous generation had not: faith must be built on specific, named acts of God, and those acts must be passed on. The stones at Gilgal were God's command, but Joshua's obedience in following through reveals a man who grasped that memory is never passive. It must be constructed, named, tended, and told.

### **Read Joshua 3:14-17 (ESV)**

*"So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan."*

This passage describes one of the defining miracles of Israel's history, deliberately echoing the parting of the Red Sea under Moses. The note that the Jordan was overflowing its banks during harvest season is important. This was not a low crossing but a raging flood, making the miracle impossible to explain away. The priests stepped in first, before the waters parted, demanding faith before sight. The waters stopped far upstream at a town called Adam, a geographical marker that would have made the miracle verifiable and unforgettable for anyone who traveled that road afterward. God was not merely providing a way across; He was staging an event so unmistakable that it would demand to be told and retold. He was building the memorial before anyone had picked up a stone.

### **Read Joshua 4:4-9 (ESV)**

*"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, 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.' 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. 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."*

This passage reveals that there were actually two sets of memorial stones - twelve carried out to Gilgal for all to see, and twelve set by Joshua in the riverbed itself, submerged and hidden beneath the water. Together they frame the miracle from both sides: one monument visible to every passerby on land, and one permanent, unseen testimony beneath the surface. The

instruction to answer children's questions is the beating heart of the passage. God designs memorials not as monuments to human achievement but as conversation-starters - invitations for one generation to testify to the next about what He has done. The stones do not explain themselves; they require a speaker, a witness, someone who was there and is willing to tell it again.

### **Read Joshua 4:19-24 (ESV)**

*"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. And he said to the people of Israel, '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 crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed 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's explanation of the stones reveals two audiences for the memorial: future Israelite children who need to know their inheritance, and the surrounding nations who need to encounter the character of God. The explicit comparison to the Red Sea is Joshua deliberately threading the current generation into the founding story of Israel - connecting a new miracle to an older one so that neither can be forgotten in isolation. The phrase "so that all the peoples of the earth may know" is striking. A memorial built from river stones on the edge of an unfamiliar land was designed to carry a message about God's power to the entire world. Personal testimonies, Joshua implies, are never merely personal.

### **Deeper Dive Discussion Questions**

1. Joshua led a generation into a promise they had heard about their whole lives but had never personally experienced. How does someone build genuine, active faith in God's faithfulness when they haven't yet seen it for themselves - and what role do other people's testimonies play in that?
2. God commanded Joshua to build the memorial before the battle of Jericho - before Israel had won a single victory in the Promised Land. Why do you think God placed the act of remembrance before the next challenge rather than after it? What does that order suggest about the relationship between gratitude and courage?
3. Joshua's explanation of the Gilgal stones included the phrase "so that all the peoples of the earth may know." In what ways might your personal testimony - the specific memorials God has built from your own life - carry a message beyond your immediate circle? Is there someone outside your faith community who needs to hear what God has done for you?