

Memorial Stones. When my golden retriever, Brodie died in late August, 2019, I was devastated. He was my best friend. I had taught him many tricks. The dog could open doors in the house with his nose, and if I gave him the stay command outside, he would sit and not move, even if I walked around the entire house without him seeing me. But at age 11 ½ Brodie's back legs gave out on occasion, and he had tumors all over his body. So we had to put him down. My wife and I decided to have Brodie cremated and his ashes returned to us. I now have those ashes in a box. One day, I plan to bury the box that contains Brodie in the ground, and put a memorial stone over his gravesite. I am sure you have done the same type of thing if you have had a pet dog or cat. At National cemetery and in other cemeteries, we put stones or markers over gravesites to remind us of special people in our lives. Every time we see that head stone, we are reminded of the person and the life they lived amongst us. This weekend, our focus is on those men and women who got together in homes to study God's Word, with the hope of starting a church in the Villages, Florida. They wanted a church that preached a clear message that we are saved by God's grace thru faith alone in Christ, a church that did not change Scripture to accommodate the times, a church that showed Christlike love to everyone.

Today Open Bible has grown in membership to around 200 members as we celebrate 10 years in our new worship sanctuary. After our service today, we will dedicate our Memorial Garden, where we remember our loved ones who have journeyed on to their heavenly home as well as the founders of Open Bible. Our theme today is: "Leave A Legacy That Will Last!"

Our text today takes us back about 3,500 years to the time when the Israelites crossed over into the Promised Land under the guidance of Joshua. Their great journey had begun forty years earlier with a miraculous escape through the water of the Red Sea, and it concluded with a miraculous passage through the waters of the Jordan River. In both cases God parted the waters so that his people could walk across on dry land.

The Jordan River crossing might not seem as spectacular because the Israelites didn't have to walk as far. But at the time of the crossing, the river was running at flood stage. Anyone who has waded up to his waist or even up to his thighs in a fast-flowing river knows what a frightening experience that can be. Lose your footing and you may never come up for air again. So how were two million men, women, and children, and all their sheep and goats supposed to get across the Jordan? The Promised Land may have only been meters away but it would have remained out of reach had God not intervened.

Through Joshua, God directed the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant into the raging river waters. As soon as the priests' feet touched the water, it stopped flowing and "piled up" further upstream at a place called Adam. That would have been a sight to see: raging river water stopped cold as if it had hit an invisible dam! How high do you suppose the water towered over the dry river bed as it kept piling up? What we do know is that there was now enough room for the two million Israelites with all their possessions to cross over in a single day. Only one group stood still as this happened: the priests holding the Ark of the Covenant. They stood firm in the middle of the temporarily dry riverbed while everyone else filed safely by.

What was God trying to impress upon his people with this miracle? He was demonstrating how he is not a God who is far away. Indeed, he was right there in the thick of things, holding back waters that otherwise would have kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land. God hasn't changed. He's still in the thick of things protecting his

people. Fifteen hundred years after the Jordan River crossing, the Son of God would stand up in the middle of a storm on the Sea of Galilee and command it to be still. In Gethsemane he stepped forward to be arrested so that his disciples could go free. Nor did he flinch when on Calvary he not only allowed nails to be driven through his hands and feet but let God the Father charge him with the sins of the world. In Joshua's day God held back the raging waters of the Jordan River but in Jesus' day, God's Son held back his Father's rage over our continued self-centeredness.

How can we not commemorate this sacrifice which means victory over sin and a place in heaven instead of hell? Of course we do commemorate Jesus' death by displaying crosses in prominent places in our churches and in our homes. And that's proper to do. In fact God told Joshua to do something similar. When everyone had crossed over the Jordan River, twelve men, one from each tribe, were supposed to heave a large stone on their backs from the very place where the priests were standing in the Jordan River and haul it to their camping spot that night. There they were to assemble the stones into a monument. For what purpose did God want these things done? God explained: "[These stones are to] serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever".

God wanted his people to commemorate his saving acts because commemoration leads to contemplation, and contemplation leads to celebration. Here's what I mean. Although the Israelites must have been thrilled to finally set foot in the Promised Land, they must have been apprehensive too. After all they weren't moving into an empty apartment building. The Canaanites still lived in the land and they weren't about to give it up without a fight. How was a bunch of wandering nomads going to take on people desperate to save their homeland? How were they going to conquer cities that had been expertly fortified for years? If the Israelites started to doubt the wisdom of the planned conquest, they just had to look at those twelve stones plucked from the Jordan River earlier that day and contemplate what they meant. Those stones meant that they were not alone. God had brought them to this land through a series of miracles and God would keep working miracles if that's what it took for them to possess the land. That contemplation would in turn lead to celebrating the great acts of salvation God had performed and would yet perform for his people.

Has God told us to build similar memorials to commemorate his saving acts? Earlier I mentioned our practice of putting up crosses in our churches and homes to remind us of God's love for us through Jesus but this isn't something God has commanded us to do. In fact a cross could easily become an idol if we think that just because we wear one or display a cross in our home that God is going to make life easy for us and let us into heaven someday. No, God has never told us to build anything to commemorate his saving acts. However, he has himself provided us with a memorial to commemorate his saving acts. It is Holy Communion. The Apostle Paul tells us that with the Lord's Supper we proclaim the Lord's death. So by coming to Holy Communion you are commemorating Jesus' death. But I hope you are also contemplating what that death means for you. It means forgiveness, as does this sacrament for Jesus' gives us his body and blood with the bread and wine!

There's still another memorial that God has set up to commemorate his saving acts. YOU! Like the stones plucked from the middle of the Jordan River and put on display, you were plucked from certain damnation and put on display for all to see. And what do people see when they look at you? Do they see your God-hewn beauty in the way that you keep speaking kindly and gently even when the customer service agent keeps putting you on hold? Or do they see a stone that's covered in coarse graffiti as you give that agent a piece of your mind? Or perhaps most people don't notice you at all because you look like a million other stones out there – worried about making friends, concerned about your health, trying to stay current with the latest sports and news stories...as if this is what life is all about. Friends, God has made you to be different - to be like little rocks who proclaim with words and actions the Rock on which we stand: Jesus who loves us and gave his life for us

The 9/11 Memorial looks pretty spectacular. It should after the \$700 million spent on it. But I'm not sure it's a memorial that I ever want to visit. I don't want to be reminded of that terrible day, 18 years ago. It was a day of such vulnerability and hopelessness. Who wants to commemorate that?

On the other hand, the pile of stones near the Jordan River may not have even been worth \$70 dollars but it filled the Israelites with this confidence: God is in our midst! God keeps his promises. God will see us through the storms of life. Likewise the bread and wine of Holy Communion is worth pennies but this memorial meal brings God to our very midst. Through Jesus' body and blood we receive the forgiveness of sins AND the power and courage to stand tall as a memorial to God's love and grace.

What will people remember you for? Live to be remembered for the important things. Live to be remembered for giving up your rights and your possessions for the benefit of others. Live for acts of kindness that lighten the load of those who are hurting and weary. Live to be remembered as one who loved Jesus and it really showed in your life. Leave Behind a Legacy That Will Last!"