

# Preparing For A New Beginning

Sermon 3 - Mark That Transition! Joshua 4

Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church, March 5, 2006

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What do you do to remember key events in your life? Maybe you keep a journal or a photo album. I've always been kind of a collector/gatherer. I have all kinds of things I've kept through the years to remind me of special times. It's not unusual for me to have a buckeye or rock in my pocket that I collected during my childhood. Those were important times to me and I don't want to forget them.

You and I are about to go through a significant transition in the life of our church: we are going to move into our first building. I personally believe God wants us to mark it in some way in our hearts, our minds, and our testimonies that it might be used to make a lasting difference in our lives and others.

Look with me at Joshua 4. The people of Israel had just gone through the most significant event of their life. That had walked through the Jordan River on dry ground. So fresh was this experience that the water was still standing back and the priests were still in their position on the riverbed. For years that had heard about the Promised Land and now they were standing on it. How could they ever forget this experience? The sensation of it was still running through their bodies.

But it is at this moment of experience in their life that we learn why it is important to mark the significant transitions of our lives that God has been involved in. We are going to find three obvious reasons in this chapter.

## **Reason # 1 – God Desires It**

The first reason, and I think the most important one, is that God desires it. Take a look at verses 1-3...

Did you notice WHO did the talking in those verses? It was not Joshua or anyone else that initiated the marking of this transition in the life of Israel; God alone came up with the idea. It was His desire and not Joshua's.

God saw the importance/value of doing something that would help them remember what He had done for them. God enabled them to pass through the Jordan River at flood stage on dry ground. That was a dramatic moment, something they would never want to forget, and something they would want to tell their grandkids about. But God knows how soon His people forget.

Remember the ten plagues in Egypt and how God used them to bring them out of Egypt in His might? But when they had their backs to the Red Sea they forgot God's power. Remember how God opened up the Red Sea and allowed them to walk safely through but destroyed the army of Egypt? But once they were in the wilderness and thirsty they

forgot His provision. Remember how God gave them water from a rock and manna from heaven? But at the foot of Mount Sinai they forgot God and worshiped a golden calf instead. God knows how soon His people forget.

For that reason God desired they mark this transition. See verses 4-7...

Joshua is doing all the talking in these verses but merely telling the people what God told him. The instructions were clear. They were to take twelve men, one from each tribe, and have each of them choose a rock from the riverbed to be placed in a pile later that day. There were three motivations to God's desire:

- (1) As a sign for them. The word *sign* speaks of a witness or testimony. Whenever they would see that pile of stones the stones would testify to what God had done.
- (2) As a sign for their children and grandchildren. God desired this so when the children would see the stones and ask what they were about the fathers would have the opportunity to tell them what God had done.
- (3) As a sign for others so that they would know God is strong and awesome.

Does God still desire such memorials/ Does He still want us to mark our transitions? I believe He does. We're no better at remembering than they were. That's why we have the Lord's Supper and Baptism. They are signs of something God has done and are intended to remind us lest we forget.

Every time someone is baptized we remember the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Every time we take the bread and cup we remember the death of Christ in our place and the shedding of His blood for us. When our children see us take communion or see someone baptized they want to know why and it gives us an opportunity to share the gospel with them.

Now, am I suggesting that we set up a pile of stones on the church property? No. That would not have any significance for us. That was for Israel. But the building can serve that purpose well. You and I could not have bought the property and built the building had God not made it possible. Every time we see it we should remember what God has done for us and we should use it as an object lesson for our children and others that they might know God is real and working among us.

But God's desire goes beyond the building. He wants us to be marked by the experience. We're not going to look at it now but chapter 5 illustrates this well. What God has done should set us apart and help us to live more distinctly so that others will know that God is alive and at work in our lives.

That is God's desire. Is it finding fulfillment in you?

## **Reason # 2 – It Is Our Duty**

Reason number 2 should make perfect sense. If God desires it then it also becomes our duty. See verses 8-20...

Here we have the description of the crossing of the river, the taking of the stones, the return of the water, and the setting up of the stones in Gilgal. We are told that everything the Lord commanded they did.

Whatever the Lord commands then you and I have a duty/responsibility to do what He has commanded.

I find it most significant that the marking of this transition and the repetition of the story were given to the people, most specifically the fathers. The presence of the priests is obvious, the activity of Joshua and the leaders is obvious but when it came to marking this transition the responsibility was not given to Joshua, the leaders, or the priests, it was given to the people.

Now I want to point out two different things here:

First to the fathers, No one will have a greater impact upon your kids than you. Whether for bad or good your influence is significant. For that reason it is a duty that God has placed upon you to teach your children the things of God. That doesn't mean the role/influence of mother is not important. It is. For too many kids today that is all they have because of a host of irresponsible fathers. This doesn't mean that the role/influence of the local church is not important. It is. What it simply means is that God has given fathers a specific responsibility and He will hold them accountable. Ephesians 6:4, *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."*

Fathers, you are to seek every opportunity you can to teach your children the things of God. Teach them about baseball and how to drive a car but make sure especially that you teach them about God and that they see that He is important to you and should be important to them. See Judges 2:10...

Here we find a description of the grandchildren of the families Joshua was speaking to. They knew not the Lord. Why? Their fathers failed in their responsibility. Don't let that happen to the generation that follows you.

Second, I want to say something to the congregation. Sharing the gospel and telling others about the things God has done is not the business of professionals. There is a reason God gave this responsibility to the congregation of Israel and not to Joshua or the priests. No one can have the impact on family and friends like you. Most people that come to church do so at the invitation of a friend. Most people that receive Christ do so through the influence of a friend.

Has God done something among us? Then tell people about it! Invite them to come and see for themselves that God might show Himself mighty and awesome to them.

That's how you mark this transition and it is a duty you and I should not want to escape.

### **Reason # 3 – Others Deserve It**

This leads naturally to the third reason provided in our passage for marking our transition. Others deserve it! See verses 21-24...

Two groups of people are mentioned in these verses. We've already talked about them.

The first group is our children. There is no one in this world more important than our children. The sooner we understand that the better our world will be. If we lose our children we lose everything.

I have always been impressed with the example of Noah. He preached the word of God for 100 years and no one got saved but his own kids but that was enough to save the world. Our greatest impact in the world will be the impact we have on our kids.

The transition we are going through right now as a church is a great opportunity to teach our children about God's faithfulness and goodness. Make sure they hear about it from your lips. Make sure they see the excitement of it in your eyes.

The other group is the world, verse 24. When God does something in our lives He wants us to mark it and tell others about it so that they will know Him too.

My greatest opportunity to talk to people about the Lord this past year has been because of our building project so I want to make as much of that as I can. It is a sign that others have seen that we can interpret for them and point them to the One who made it possible. If we take the time to do so, they will know what God is doing, they will know what God is like, and they will come to worship God themselves.

So, let's mark this transition in our lives and mark it well. God desires it! It is our duty! And, others deserve it!