

Remembering
Courageous Series Week 5
Joshua 4
September 25, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

This is our fourth week in a seven-week series called Courageous—if you're new, let me get you up to speed

we're looking at a character in the Bible who was told by God to be strong and courageous amidst a huge transition and as he takes the lead of a nation of people facing all sorts of challenges

And then he is! At every turn, Joshua faces all kinds of obstacles and challenges
And he lives a strong and courageous life over and over and over again

And so we're looking at his story and talking about how WE might live lives of every-day courage, too

Because we feel most alive and are our best selves when we're living courageously

We believe that's because that God has made us in his image to live lives that are marked by courage, not settling for a life of fear or even comfort

Some of you aren't sure if you believe the whole God thing, we're so glad that you're here

We invite you to join us as all of us are on a journey of figuring out how we might become people who are strong and courageous and how God might be a part of that

Now of course, along with that personal application, here at Chatham Community Church we're also on the verge of a big transition

at some point later this fall we're going to start our new Pittsboro service

And we're going to call all of us to be strong and courageous in starting something new that will reach out to more people across our community

Some of us will be strong and courageous and go and some of us will be strong and courageous and send and pray and encourage this new venture.

But as a church, we're going to need to be strong and courageous to reach and serve our larger community and as we head into a season of transition for the sake of the mission God's called us to serve Chatham County

Last week, we talked about how the entire nation of Israel were on one side of the Jordan River while the land God promised them was on the other side

And God did a miracle to stop the waters so they could pass through it, but the priests had to step into the water FIRST before God stopped the water flowing

And we talked about how sometimes God does miracles around us without our participation or cooperation, but how sometimes he calls us to step out first

And to TRUST him; to trust that God is an upstream-working God who delights to create downstream miracles

And that's exactly what he does

the priests step into the Jordan River carrying the ark of the covenant, the waters pile up 17 miles away, and the people cross over on dry land

So we left the story as the people were crossing over the Jordan river triumphantly and very safely, with the priests standing in the middle of the river, holding up the ark of the covenant

And today, as God continually calls his people to be strong and courageous, he's going to instruct them to set up a memorial to fuel them to be strong and courageous for generations to come

This is something that we can resonate with because part of what God is trying to do is keep them from FORGETTING something very important that has happened in the life of their nation

And FORGETTING important things is something that many of us can relate to, can't we? How many of you have ever FORGOTTEN an important birthday or anniversary at some point in your life?

Life gets busy and we can get swamped with what's right in front of us or what's coming at us in the future and we can FORGET some really important things

Some of them are really important things that have happened to us in the past that if we would rightly hold onto them COULD help us to be strong and courageous into the future

This morning in the passage that we're going to look at, God is going to call the people of Israel to REMEMBER and to TELL of what he has done so that future generations might also be strong and courageous

And this morning, we're going to take a little time as well to remember how God has been faithful to us

Because when we remember and recount and recite and share the stories of how God has been faithful to us in the past, it helps us to have a better understanding of WHO God is

So that when we face our unknown futures and as we're battling threats and challenges in our present, we know that we can trust our unknown-futures to a well-known God which gives us the fuel for a strong and courageous life

Joshua 4:

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ²“Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

⁴So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, ⁵and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶to serve as a sign among you.

We have several great and important ministries around here, but one of them that I know has been particularly impactful for some of our folks has been Divorce Care.

Divorce Care of course is for people who are trying to process in a healthy way all of the pain that is inherent in any divorce, even the most amicable ones

I have a ton of respect for the people who participate in Divorce Care sometimes we have to be especially strong and courageous to recognize when we can't navigate something on our own and reach out to get help

But I have maybe even MORE respect and appreciation for the people who lead and facilitate that ministry

Because every one of the people who have led Divorce Care here at CCC have been through the pain and trauma of divorce themselves

And for many of us, once we've gotten through something as painful and difficult as a divorce, we DON'T want to go back and re-live ANY part of that experience!

But what these folks have done is willingly circled back into the environment of people processing divorce pain in order to help other people through it

In this passage, the entire nation has just crossed through the river. And as exciting an experience as that was for everyone, it's something you only really want or need to do once You're through, you're safe, let's celebrate

But then Joshua calls everyone together and he calls these 12 tribes together—the 12 tribes of Israel originated in these 12 brothers several hundred years before this

And these 12 brothers each had huge families that ultimately comprised the 12 tribes of Israel, all one big family broken out into 12 unique family lines

So Joshua gathers them all together and he says to all the people that one person from each of the 12 tribes has to send someone BACK into the river bed to pick up a stone to build this memorial

Because in order for the entire nation to move forward, 12 of them have to GO BACK.

In order for all the people to go ahead into the future God has for them, 12 of them have return even just briefly, into the past that they just left

There is work still to do in that riverbed that will help propel them into the battles ahead.

And the work that God wants to do in this moment when he's parted the Jordan isn't completed until twelve of them go back to pick up the stones that will serve as a sign to the people and a reminder of what God has done

Talk to the great folks who volunteer with Divorce Care and ask them why they do it, and what you'll hear is that this is part of how God is redeeming one of the darkest chapters in their life

Going back is part of how they continue to move forward, going back is part of how they continue to heal and redeem the years that at one point felt like nothing but a big waste

Sometimes my friends, we get through something and we think it's all done.

But then sometimes the tap on the shoulder comes from God that he wants you to wade back into the riverbed that you just passed through in order to actually complete the crossing.

For some of us, God is calling is to take some sort of step of faith—and for some of us, that's some sort of a service or ministry work that he wants us to do

And sometimes, the seedbed of what God wants us to do in the present and the future is found in the experiences we've had in the past, some of them painful experiences

that God wants to redeem and use for his purposes in YOUR life as well as to bless and encourage others.

The story continues as Joshua continues:

“In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 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.”

My wife Kelly reads a variety of mom-blogs out in the internet—some that offer parenting advice or tips, others that are just spiritual reflections on the work of being a mom

And one of the most insightful comments that she read once that she shared with me a couple of years ago was that ***raising children is like being pecked to death by merciless chickens***

They are always asking questions—about everything! Why do you wear a ring? Why is the sky blue? What does a gas pipeline do?

If you read through the Old Testament, you see that the people of Israel has this problem that is utterly unique to them and that I’m sure NONE of you have ever struggled with: they forget things

More specifically, they forget how good God has been to them. They forget God’s goodness to them—like all the time, like almost immediately

And NONE of you have ever done this, you’ve never forgotten how good God’s been to you so you might not understand what God is doing here and why this is so important, so let me see if I can explain it and try to use your imagination to grasp this

God is anticipating the problem of the Israelite’s forgetfulness and so he’s having Joshua build a mechanism for remembering.

God through Joshua is going to attempt to head off this problem before it has a chance to rear its ugly head

So Joshua in response to the command of the Lord is setting up this big pile of rocks as a conversation starter
to trigger a conversation that will be essential to the life of their nation for generations to come

When your kids ask you about this big pile of rocks, tell them what God did here
the people have witnessed a miracle, and they have been privileged to have God work in their midst

And with this tremendous gift and with this tremendous privileged experience, comes a responsibility to be historian storytellers.

They must tell this story to their children. They must enter into this opportunity to tell the story of what God has done in their midst

This is so important Joshua is going to repeat this command all over again at the very end of the passage

Extra-ink means extra-important in the Bible!

This is so important, that the people learn how to talk about the faithfulness of God to one another and to their kids

In PART so that their kids will grow up knowing it AND in part so that THEY will remember it, will keep coming back to it, will NOT forget how good God is and how faithful he's been to them

And I want to suggest to you that maybe Israel isn't quite so alone in this problem, are they? Maybe, just maybe, you and I struggle with the exact same problem of very short spiritual memory

And so we need to find ways to create our own markers or triggers that point our hearts back to remembering God's faithfulness

And we need to be able to talk about it to one another and to our kids

not JUST for the other person's sake or for your kids sake but for US, so that WE also might remember what God has done in our lives

Some of you struggle with this because you grew up in a family where you went to church on Sundays but you didn't TALK about it

Church for your family growing up was like this weird alternate universe that you and your whole family entered into for an hour or two on Sundays

and then you all silently mutually agreed at the end of it to never speak of it again to anyone ever—what happened at church STAYED at church, it was just like VEGAS!

And maybe as a little kid you didn't know any better and you'd break the cone of silence and you'd ask a few genuine questions

stuff like "what's God like?" or "how do we know that God's real?"

And your parents looked at you in horror, because you mentioned God outside of church AND because they had no idea how to answer your very good, honest questions

So they hushed you up and you learned over time that the whole God thing was just something that kind of existed on the side on Sunday mornings but it didn't really integrate into the rest of our lives and our world

Which is heartbreaking on so many levels, not the least of which being that there are times in your life when you need to be strong and courageous or deal with very difficult situations

And you needed God and God was there, but you had no idea how to make that connection because you had no help integrating the spiritual life into your everyday life
and because you grew up in a context with almost zero spiritual fluency

There was an infinite pool of resources that could have helped you through that season, could have guided you through that time, could have given you wisdom and left you with fewer regrets, if you'd only known about it.

But no one told you about it, because you never talked about it. And so you limped through.
And you've got the scars to prove it and the stories of the heartbreak or the pain or the stupid thing you did or the stupid thing they did
that all could have been navigated with a great deal more wisdom, strength, and courage, if only you'd known that there was a God who existed OUTSIDE of Sundays.

And now, somehow, you ended up here. Somehow, you're in this place, in this church community
and because you didn't grow up talking about God around the house, you're still not sure really how to do this or if you know what all this means
but somehow the people around you are talking about a relationship with God that actually makes a difference in your life in real-time!

Like not just go through the motions on Sunday and then never think about it the other 6 days and 23 hours of your week
but actually having a relationship with the God of the universe that affects how you do your day job, how you deal with your cranky family member, how you make decisions

And maybe you're intrigued, maybe you're at a place in your life where you realize you want that and need that
that if it's true that following God in and through Jesus Christ can make us to be strong and courageous in our real lives, that it's worth learning how to do it

And I want to propose to you that not only is it worth learning how to do it and that it's never too late to learn how do it

I also want to propose to you that it's worth it to learn how to talk about it. In fact, we're commanded to do so.

Especially, like Joshua is talking about here, for those of us who are parents

And all around you on your calendars and in our personal lives, there are these trigger opportunities for us to be story-teller historians:

Christmas. Easter. Every Sunday on your way into church.

"Mom, dad, why do we do this? Why do we go to church? Why do we celebrate Easter and Christmas?"

You can either just go through the motions and leave everyone wondering why
OR you can take advantage of these great little sign-posts along the way.

And then there are the more personal triggers: anniversaries, birthdays, celebrations of major milestones like one-year sober or even the death of a loved one

Every birthday around our house we celebrate the person whose birthday it is at their birthday dinner by sharing ways things that we appreciate about that person

Some years it's harder than others to find nice things to say to one another, you know how that goes

but as we celebrate them we also pray a prayer of gratitude for the fact that God has given us one another and given us TO one another

In our lives in general and in the community life of us as a church, there are built-in opportunities for us to build our own memorials or to USE what's already in place to speak of God's faithfulness

to tell one another and to tell our kids what the Lord has done in our lives

And this morning, the call and the command from the Scriptures to those of us who are God-people, is that we are to not just go through the motions of church or rituals or traditions
But we are to tell the story of the faithfulness and goodness of God

We are to learn the language, develop a fluency around what God has done in history and in our lives particularly

And just like learning any new language, there's a transition into it. If you didn't grow up talking about it, of course it's going to feel awkward at first.

The only way you get better at it is by doing it, practicing it, finding your voice in it

Don't give up learning how to speak about God's story and God's faithfulness. Even if it's a little awkward for you at first.

One of our greatest cultural blunders and lies about faith is that it's a private thing. That's a total, ridiculous lie.

When we keep silent and personal about our faith, it's a recipe for ensuring that we never grow into full maturity

And it's a recipe for ensuring that our kids and all those around us never have access to the resources available to us in God to be the man or woman God intended for us to be.

That's not to say that you have to share all your deepest darkest secrets with everyone, I'm not saying that

What we are saying is that if refuse to participate in this work that God through Joshua is teeing up for the people of Israel to do

of remembering, reciting, being historian storytellers to one another in whatever ways fit with our personalities and temperaments

Then we are BOTH hurting those around us AND we are also stunting our own growth

In our small group this past week one person really pulled out that this whole remembering thing is happening in community

Joshua sets this whole thing up so that there's this mutual inter-dependence between the kids who are seeing the pile of rocks and asking the question what does this mean

And then the parents declaring the faithfulness of God to them, telling them the story of what it means—which is good for who? Both of them.

Because the kids need to know and mom and dad need to not forget what God has done here.

And so they build a memorial, a monument, and I want to encourage you and I to be creative in finding ways to do the same. Let me give you an example from my own life.

Before Kelly and I had kids we moved into our very first house that we owned up in Richmond. Been in a couple of apartments, this was our first house

And the day after we moved, I woke up early, stepped over all the boxes and cleared out a spot on the couch

there was stuff that needed to be unpacked and organized *everywhere*

But before I got to all of that, I decided that in my journal I was going to build my own little monument and record of all of the people who had helped us the day before to move in

Because it was an in-town move and we had no money, so we did it all ourselves.

Only we didn't do it all ourselves, we had this wonderful group of almost two dozen people who helped us load up, drive over, unload, and set up some of the basics.

And it was a snapshot of how rich our lives were with wonderful people and I didn't want to miss the opportunity to thank God for how generous he had been to us in giving us wonderful friends.

So right there, in my journal, I sat down and wrote down every person who helped us move and what they had done or where they had served

And I gave thanks to the Lord who had blessed us so richly

And sometimes, not always, but sometimes, when I see a picture of that house or think about our time there and I remember moving day

I remember Todd and Nancy Pitts who made like a half-dozen runs with their truck once the U-haul was full to get all our stuff over to the new place

And I remember Catherine Larsen who helped organize the kitchen

And I remember Brian and Wesley Wilcox who helped us set up our bedroom stuff and didn't leave until the bed was fully assembled so we could sleep in our bed and not camped out on the floor that night

And on and on it goes

I remember those folks because I took the time to build a little memorial there, in the middle of the boxes, my first morning in my first house

And pictures of that house now serve as a trigger to remind me how great God was to us in our time in that house, and how moving day was a big part of that

And every so often, when someone else moves or when we're talking about the old days with friends when everyone it seemed was moving every year or two

I get to share that story of how God gave us great friends who helped us to move into our very first house.

And it reminds me that at many transitions and points along the way, not all of them but many of them, God has been good to put the right people in my life to help in just the ways that I needed it

And I need to have those conversations every so often and I need to tell those stories every so often because I forget. Easily. And those triggers help me to remember.

This morning, I'm going to make a bald assertion and you can correct me later if I'm wrong about you:

You Forget. You and I both forget. And left to our own devices we'd have the spiritual memory of a goldfish. ***[Fighting Forgetfulness]***

And so my first take-home question is simply this:

what will you do this week to stop yourself from forgetting?

You can start a journal, you can build a diorama or knit a scarf or build a castle out of popsicle sticks

but somehow, some way, I want to call you to build a memorial or reminder of one way that God's been faithful to you this week!

Because you're going to forget how God's been good to you the next time crisis hits. And so am I. So together we've got to find ways to war against our short-term memories!

And I want to invite you to do this even if you're not a God-person. Say out-loud to yourself:
"Self! I'm not one of those Christian-types. Just to be clear!
But IF I was, and I'm not, but IF I was, here's how I might look at my life through those lenses and here's where I MIGHT say that God was at work in my life at some point."

And then find some way to mark those moments, to name and mark them as a part of your own spiritual journey

2. My second question is this: ***Who will you practice sharing God's faithfulness with this week?***

This takes practice, practice, practice—just like any other new language that you're learning.
How might you both build a memorial this week and then take an opportunity to EXPLAIN what it is that you're remembering? ***Who*** can you share your story with?

Going to give us all a chance to actually do this this morning....underneath your seats is a rock, pick that up for me

This morning, we're going to build our own monument to God's faithfulness in our lives.

In the Old Testament one of the things that they used to do was prayerfully place all the sins of the community onto a goat and send it out into the wilderness, taking away their sins

Today, each of us is going to prayerfully place some memories of God's faithfulness onto this rock, some way that you've seen or experienced or known God to be faithful, some time when God has come through for you

Could have been in the past week or could have been 25 years ago. But you're going to pray over this rock

And then as we move into this time of worship, I'm going to invite you to bring your rock up front to this table right here in the front, and we're going to build Chatham Community Church's memorial to God's faithfulness

Each of us contributing our story to the larger story of how God's been faithful to us in the past, so that we might be encouraged by

And then on your way home in the car, or in your small group this week, or when you bump into each other at the grocery store this week

I want to encourage and invite us to ask and answer the question: what did your stone mean?

And to practice telling the story of God's great faithfulness to one another.