

Joshua 4:1-24

This incident was the fulfilment of a promise to the people of Israel that they would have a land of their own. They had been slaves in Egypt and they had been at the border of the Promised Land 40 years before but they chose not to go in and take the land then and it cost them 40 years in the wilderness.

They have come to the river Jordan and it is in flood so they can't cross it. God tells Joshua to have the Priests take the Ark of the Covenant (which was supposed to remind them that God was with them) into the river – and when they get to the water it will dry up and allow them to cross on dry ground.

Here, at last, they have crossed into that land. So why would they be told to gather up stones from the river and build a memorial?

The thing is that people forget the past very quickly – especially if they weren't actually involved themselves. Within a few years all of the people who had lived in the desert would have died and all that would be left was their stories. Eventually even the stories don't seem to be so real either and memories fade. That's why they placed the stones – so that they could go back there and have a physical reminder of the struggles of the past – and that the stories were real. It is 100 years since the start of the First World War and nearly everyone who lived through that is dead. Even if you were born during the war you would be quite old now and so we rely on the memories of others and their stories of what it was like to live through that war. Those memories come to us from pictures and films, poetry and diaries.

We also remember things or people by building our own memorials.

This picture (of the church) shows us something that has been built to help us remember – this church building was built to help people to remember to worship God and to help others in our community.

Psalm 103 tells us not to forget all His benefits,
all the things that God has done for us.

- He's given us life and breath,
- health and strength.
- He's offers forgiveness and clean consciences.

- He's promised us eternal life and hope in the midst of death.
- Our lives have purpose and meaning because of what the Lord has done.

The Bible says that everything – from good to bad, from fair to middling – works together for the good of those who love God.

Do you see what that means? That even the worst things that could possibly happen to a person can be used for good if they have a relationship with God. Even the worst tragedies can be turned to something positive, because we serve such a powerful and loving God who can bring something beautiful out of them.

Ah, but we forget so easily. We lose sight, we lose hope, we lose faith. We go about our daily existences, forgetting all the wonderful things God has done, forgetting all the great stuff ahead.

No wonder that over and over in the Bible, someone builds an altar of stones, from Noah to Moses, from Jacob to Elijah, for the purpose of remembering what God had done for them. One stone upon another, laid carefully to withstand the elements, to serve as a reminder for generations that God had been kind to them.

Life gets rough sometimes, and we forget where we have come from. We use things like fridge magnets with Bible verses, to remind us when we get our orange juice that the Lord is our shepherd. We need bookmarks in our favourite reading materials, to remind us that God will never leave us or forsake us. We need the company of other people who love the Lord, to remind us that we are not alone on our journey.

A wedding ring is a symbol and a reminder of love and commitment, and Joshua's pile of rocks served the same purpose. Years later, people would look at them and be reminded of God's love for them, and commitment to them, and they would be thankful.

As God's people we need to remember that we are loved and that's one of the reasons we meet together week by week – so that we take time to encourage each other to remember God and all that he's done for us.

The ultimate example of a memorial is the cross. It reminds us that, even although we may not have realised it, we were enemies of God but through the cross Jesus made it possible for us to become God's friends.

Romans 5: 9 But there is more! Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life's blood, we will also be kept safe from God's anger. 10 Even when we were God's enemies, he made peace with us, because his Son died for us. Yet something even greater than friendship is ours. Now that we are at peace with God, we will be saved by his Son's life. 11 And in addition to everything else, we are happy because God sent our Lord Jesus Christ to make peace with us.

The cross reminds us of who we were, who we are, where we're going, who made it happen, and how He did it. The cross is more than a nice piece of jewellery; it is a memorial, reminding us of what Jesus did for us, to set us free and give us hope of eternity with him. His really was the ultimate sacrifice and the only fitting response is to give him our lives in return.