**Never Forget**

*Joshua 4*

**Introduction:**  Forgetfulness is part of our human condition, particularly strong because of our sinful condition. How many times have we forgotten a birthday, anniversary, or Valentine’s Day? Who has forgotten where a parking spot was supposed to be, a password, or the spare key? Forgetfulness is not simply an issue for followers of Christ, but is recognized as an issue for everyone in the world. That is why there is a universal system to impress on our memory to remember important things called *memorials.* These memorials are crafted so that people living and generations to come would remember the dramatic events that happened at a particular time and place. Take these famous memorials that we would all recognize:

* **The** **memorial placed for 9/11** – Even the theme “never forget” understands the need to remember these events but our propensity to forget
* **The Vietnam Veteran’s memorial –** So many names that cannot be forgotten for a war that was not always welcome in the U.S
* **Pearl Harbor –** The memorial over the U.S. Arizona reminds us of the entry of the U.S into WWII
* **Holocaust museum –** An immense amount of human loss that boggles the mind, but memorials all over the world determine that we won’t forget what happened.

We need memorials because we are forgetful. Followers of Christ need memorials because **forgetfulness is the enemy of faith.** Forgetfulness is a Petri dish where sin is formed, bred, and multiplied. Forgetfulness spawns discontent, laziness, ingratitude, and laziness. It is not a question of “if” we are forgetful of God’s grace, it’s a matter of degree. When we forget about God, when we forget about His grace, His glory, or His work, we live like **practical atheists,** *believing there is a God but living like He doesn’t exist.* God knows us better than we know ourselves, and He knows that we are forgetful, and thus gives us ways to remember Him, to keep our eyes fixed on Him alone. This is the heart of Joshua 4 as Israel was in final preparations of conquering the Promised Land. Israel was to cross the Jordan River on dry ground after observing the miraculous power of God to roll back the water. Now they were to take with themselves 12 stones, one for each tribe, to memorialize this event. The enemy in Canaan was fierce, **but the enemy within each Israelite to forget was a much greater foe.**

1. **The Plight of Forgetfulness** (Deuteronomy 8)

In order to understand the need for these memorials, we have to go back to Moses’ address to the people before he died. Deuteronomy 8 is a chapter that is as relevant today as it was back then. Moses cautioned the people to remember God as they entered into the Promised Land (8:2). He then recalled what had gone on the last 40 years: God humbled and tested them in the wilderness, fed them manna, and did not allow their clothes to wear out, all so they would know without a shadow of a doubt that God was leading them and He was greater than any other God. But now was where the problem came: they would now enter into a land that had everything they could ever want (8:7-10) and more, and NOW came the real test. Would they remember God in the midst of much, or forget Him because they did not think they needed Him anymore?

1. **The Reason we forget: self-replacement**

* **We don’t “need” God in the “good” times**

**Deuteronomy 8:11-14** "Take care lest you **forget the LORD** your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, 12 lest, **when** you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, 13 and **when** your herds and flocks **multiply** and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 **then** your heart be lifted up, ***and you forget the LORD your God***, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,

Why are we so prone to this? Why do we cry out to God in crisis (when we have no where else to turn), but ignore Him when things are good? It has everything to do with how we view God. If God is a **cosmic** **butler or divine therapist**, He is there at my disposal to help me when I need Him. I can ring the bell for His services (no questions asked) and He is there, He is not demanding, and He will bring what I need. The problem, obviously, is that is not who God is at all. Yes, He desires to help, Yes, He answers prayer, and Yes, He responds when we cry out to Him. But our need for God is much more holistic than just in the bad times. We were made to be worshippers, to be dependant on Him and to honor Him in all that we do. **We forget God because we think He is there to serve us, not we to serve Him.** We were created to worship Him, not the other way around.

* **We elevate ourselves to God’s status**

**Deuteronomy 8:17** Beware lest you say in your heart, **'My** power and the might of **my** hand have gotten me this wealth.'

The other clear reason we forget God is we replace the power of God with our **own perceived power**. This was seen in Israel when they started with nothing, were desperately dependant on God for sustenance, were given everything their heart desires, and instead of turning that into an opportunity to worship, made it into reveling in self achievement. They moved from receiving everything from the hand of God to thinking it was their hand that produced the good they were experiencing.

If this is not one of the most highly relevant and appropriate sections of Scripture for our day, I don't know what is. When we become followers of Jesus, we immediately recognize that all things are His: our life, health, wealth, future, time, family, and comfort are all in **HIS HANDS**. We entrust all of this to Christ because He is Lord and we know He always does what's best. We start by saying it all belongs to Him, but along the way something sinister happens in our heart. We believe that the hard work, proper planning, and savvy investments have produced something that is OURS. We begin to trust our bank account, retirement portfolio, or the sustainability of the government for our security. Instead of keeping an open hand with these and letting Jesus control, we hold onto the things we think we deserve, earned, or gained, and in so doing, we **forget God.** Unfortunately, this was a prophecy Moses made against Israel, but could easily be a prophecy against us. We must remember that all that we have comes from God, not from our own doing.

1. **The Nature of forgetfulness: idolatry**

All of this forgetfulness could be simplified in one word: **idolatry**. Idolatry is anything that replaces God, and it could be something inherently sinful or inherently good. Idolatry is when we desire, serve, think about, and thus worship things instead of reserving all of that for God alone. What is the nature of idolatry?:

* **Elevating good things** (blessings) **above God**

The core of idolatry is elevating the good gifts of God (family, homes, food, nature, art, song, work) and making them ultimate. It is what Romans 1 talks about as an exchange. Idolatry is an exchange of God for something else. Instead of receiving the good thing as a gift from God to enjoy Him and praise Him, we focus on the gift instead of the Giver. This is what happens to all good things that turn idolatrous. How do we know if good things are idolatrous? **What would happen to our view of God or our joy if that good thing were taken away?**

* **Full of pride**

**Deuteronomy 8:16** who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he **might humble you** and **test you**, to do you good in the end.

God desires to humble us, because in our pride we cannot see Him clearly. When we believe we can manage life without God, our pride becomes idolatrous, allowing ourselves to take God's place.

* **Objects of worship & service**

**Deuteronomy 8:19** And if you forget the LORD your God and go after **other gods and serve them** and **worship them**, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

The core issue of idolatry is worship, and we must think about worship in much more broad strokes than simply singing or gathering on Sunday mornings. Worship is what we do with our life. ***We worship what we enjoy most, what we think of first, and work hardest for.*** God will not play second fiddle to anything or anyone, and if something competes with Him, it will ultimately lose, and so will we. What are the objects of idolatry in your life that take God's place in worship?

* **Issues out from the heart**

**Deuteronomy 8:17** Beware lest you say in your **heart**, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' 18 You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Worship is ultimately an issue of our heart, that part of us where our will, affection, and volition reside. Worship is not simply an external exercise but what goes on in our inner man. This is where idols form, and this is where we turn good things in God-replacements. It is our heart that we must guard ferociously (Prov. 4:23), because it is from our heart that God wants us to love Him (Matt. 22:37-40). So how do we train our heart to love and worship God above all things? I believe this was the nature of God's direction in Joshua 4.

1. **The Fight against Forgetfulness (Joshua 4)**
2. **Helping us remember**

**Joshua 4:7** 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."**

The story of chapter 4 tells how Joshua commanded the people to send one representative each from the 12 tribes to send down into the Jordan River and grab out a stone. This happened while the priests were still in the midst of the stopped river and everyone crossed over on dry ground. After this, the waters returned as they were before in their flooded state (4:18). The stones were taken to Gilgal which as a city on the outskirts of Jericho, as city that would house these stones (4:19-20). How they were set up we are not told, but the 12 stones were to be placed in a certain way as to be a signal, a visual of remembrance.

This seems like a strange episode (which we haven't seen anything yet in terms of strange in the book of Joshua), but the issue is clear: these stones were to be a reminder to the people of something extraordinary and significant that God did among them. This means that what God did to the Jordan was not common, but something so unusual it should be commemorated. There is an idea that the people should think about and even visit these stone regularly to remember that it was God who lead them, God who fought for them, and God who brought them into the land.

1. **Training our children to remember**

**Joshua 4:5-6** 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, 6 **that this may be a sign among you.** *When your children ask in time to come,* 'What do those stones mean to you?'

**Joshua 4:21-22** And he said to the people of Israel, "**When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?**' 22 *then you shall let your children know,* 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.'

This memorial was not simply for those who were adults at the time, but would be an opportunity to teach their children who were too young to remember or were not born yet. This is hugely significant. Moses told Israel about training children in Deuteronomy 6, that parents should speak often of God and make much of Him in daily life. Often we think that as parents we communicate best by lecture or teaching lessons, but most often our children learn through observation, learning by what is caught more than taught. When a family would make a trip to the Gilgal national park, it was assumed that the kids would ask about this memorial: why was it so important, what happened here, what does this have to do with us? The memorial would be an opportunity for parents to explain the **why question to their kids**, explaining why their family followed the Lord and what God had done. When parents forget, children will not be taught. Our children will always take their cue from how parents live their lives, even more than what comes out of our mouths.

1. **Declaring to the world to remember**

**Joshua 4:23-24** For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, 24 ***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."***

Finally, this memorial would leave no doubt to the world that God was in charge, that God was leading Israel, and most importantly, **that God was greater than any other god.** This was the essence of the conquest of Canaan, and the essence of God's demands on His people. God will not compete with other gods but has proven that He is greater. This is why He takes idolatry so seriously. The memorial at Gilgal was a reminder to all that would see it that God was mighty and that He should be feared and revered in all the world.

1. **The Sight that helps our Forgetfulness**
2. **The purpose of built-in memorials: point us to Christ**

* **The Purpose of my wedding ring**

My wedding ring is not worn because I am jewelry guy (not that there's anything wrong with that). I'm not the guy to wear a necklace, toe ring, or even a wrist watch/bracelet. Jewelry actually bugs me and would be a constant nuisance if I wore it. Yet, there is one piece of jewelry that I proudly wear, even though it was uncomfortable in the beginning, and that's my wedding ring. My wedding ring is a symbol that is a constant signal: 1) to me, it reminds me of the covenant relationship that I entered into with Erin before man but especially before God. It reminds me of the choice to love, the need of grace, and the joy of relationship 2) It communicates to my kids that daddy is married to mommy, and they can find security in that relationship 3) It communicates to those around that I am off limits, that I am married, and that I'm not looking for another.

Wedding rings point us back to an object: marriage. But we have other memorials to point us back to something even more important**: Jesus Christ**.

* **Nature**

**Psalm 19:1** TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. **The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

Everyday we should be reminded that God is there, that He is not silent, and that He is in control. Each day we have an opportunity to praise God but also we are reminded that all things are created by Jesus, for Jesus, and through Jesus (Col. 1:16)

* **God’s Word**

We search God's Word to recalibrate our thinking about ourselves and God. We also know that all Scriptures bear witness about Christ (John 5:39), so as we read and meditate, we are reminded and refocused to worship Jesus

* **Cross**

The cross is a consistent reminder to us of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The cross is where Jesus made peace by His blood, where we were reconciled to the Father, and where we are reminded of our forgiveness of sin (Col 1:19-23)

* **Corporate gathering**

Why do we get together every week? Each week we get together to remember that we are not alone and to re-center our thinking on the resurrected Jesus. Each week is a celebration of victory, that Jesus has risen from the dead, conquering sin and death. We all have the propensity to drift in our thinking and experience away from Christ, and corporate gatherings call us back to Jesus at the center.

* **Baptism**

Baptism is a public identification, a signal to believers and unbelievers that one is identified with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection. This is why we make it public and make sure that someone shares their testimony of the work and power of Christ in their life when they are baptized.

* **Communion**

**1 Corinthians 11:24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

**1 Corinthians 11:25-26** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Finally, communion is something we observe often because it characterizes the same things that the memorial at Gilgal did: reminds us, informs our children, and declares Christ to the world. This is why we have our kids stay in, not so to pressure parents to have their kids participate, but it creates opportunities to teach our kids and answer the "why" questions they have, pointing them back to Christ.

1. **The downside of built-in memorials: replace Christ**

Unfortunately, there are down-sides to memorials, and we must be aware of these in order to avoid making good memorials into idolatrous ones.

* **Memorials can easily turn into a "means of righteousness" -** Keeping memorials can easily replace the object of the memorial, and become what we point to as a means of being righteous. Just as wearing a wedding ring does not necessarily make me married (or a good husband), so keeping these memorials is not how we are made right with Christ. It is not in going to church or participating in communion that saves, but its because we have been saved that we willingly and gladly participate in things that help point us to Christ.
* **Memorials can easily turn idolatrous -** We can easily focus on the memorial and forget Christ. We can go through the motions of these, we can be passionate about the form of memorials, and we can be indignant when people don't do these the way we do, and in doing, we can miss Jesus. We must commit to keeping memorials as what they are: **they remind us and point us back to Christ, because He is our life and it is He that we worship alone.**

**Commitment Points:**

* Are you committed to identifying idols in your life, so that you can turn from them and worship God alone? What are the idols in your life, those things that tend to take the place of Christ? How do we keep them in the right place?
* Are you committed to remembering Jesus? What are times and areas that you are prone to forget? What happens to you when you do forget?
* Are you committed to keeping memorials in your life to point you back to Jesus? What are the memorials in your life? How can they be used properly? How have you seen them used negatively?