

Joshua 4:19-24 ESV The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. **20** And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. **21** 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.’ **23** 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.”

- I. After 40 years of wandering, Israel has come to the Jordan river, border of the Promised Land. With the river in flood stage, God ordered the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant into the water. As soon as their feet got wet, the downstream flow of water piled up in a heap, and all of the Israelites miraculously crossed over on dry ground, just like they had done so many years before at the Red Sea.
 - A. They prepare to take possession of the new home God had prepared for them. But he has a final instruction, designed to help them remember their journey.
 1. Twelve strong men (one from each tribe) are to select a large stone from the now dry river bed, right where the priests had stood with the Ark. They are to carry these rocks to the other side of the Jordan River, piling them as a memorial to the great saving, delivering power of the Lord on their behalf.
 2. Not only will they be able to come back and look on this pile of rocks, remembering God’s faithfulness, but they will be able to tell the children (who wouldn’t remember or weren’t born yet) what happened in that place as well.
 - B. Over the millennia, the exact location of the 12 stones has been lost. But the point is that God’s people were to look back, and remember God’s faithfulness.
- II. On the tail end of our recent vacation, Ginger and I drove through Selma, Alabama, where one of the great landmarks to the civil rights struggles of black Americans is located. The Edmund Pettus Bridge, spans the Alabama river, and is named after a senior officer in the confederate army and grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan.
 - A. In 1965, Dallas county, Alabama was approximately 57% black, but the voter rolls were 99% white. In order to register to vote, a black person would have to pay a poll tax, answer complex questions in a so-called “literacy test”, and have a registered voter (certainly a white person) vouch for their moral character.
 1. These egregious abuses of power got the attention of many civil rights organizations, who decided to press the issue of voting rights in Selma.
 2. Standing in the way of this was Sheriff Jim Clark, Director of the Alabama DPS Al Lingo, and Governor George Wallace, all notorious, racist bullies.
 - B. After several peaceful demonstrations that still resulted in beatings, arrests and the murder of an unarmed man, Jimmie Lee Jackson; a strategy was born for the oppressed people of Selma to march 60 miles to the state capital in Montgomery, drawing attention to their plight by taking their case to the doorstep of the Governor’s office, with the entire nation watching.
 1. But on March 7th, 1965, as over 500 black people crossed the Pettus bridge, they saw a sea of armed, scowling sheriff’s deputies, Alabama state troopers, and a deputized county posse waiting for them on the other side.

2. They were told to disperse immediately, and were given 2 minutes to comply. But 40 seconds later the mob rushed the unarmed protestors and began beating them with nightsticks, whips, and running them down on horseback.
- C. Soon the Pettus Bridge was obscured by a choking cloud of tear gas, as many of the demonstrators lay bleeding with fractured ribs, limbs and skulls. They retreated back to the church where they had gathered that morning, only to be ambushed by Selma city police on the other side of the Pettus bridge. This tragic day became known as “Bloody Sunday” in the Black community.
 1. However, the people persevered, and about 2 weeks later, they marched through rain and camped in mud until 5 days later they reached the steps of the capitol in Montgomery and Martin Luther King delivered a speech.
 2. Five months later, Selma rejoiced as Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, giving all people unencumbered access to vote.
- D. For people of color, the Edmund Pettus Bridge is almost sacred ground, as the blood of martyrs in their struggle was spilled there. Ginger and I walked across it in the footsteps of those Giants, pondering their story. As we came over to the other side, where the atrocities took place, we saw an amazing thing.
 1. On a simple pile of large granite stones was etched the passage we read:

“When your children shall ask you in the time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then you shall tell them how you made it over.”
 2. I had already planned to preach from this passage before I left on vacation. I was stunned at what a great illustration the Lord had dropped in my lap.
- III. Reading this passage a few weeks ago, I wondered if I had piled any stones for someone to see, ask about, and therefore learn of the goodness of the Lord.
 - A. I’m talking about having a testimony. Testimonies don’t come through free flowing blessing and leisurely strolls through the happy times of life. They come through pain, persecution, trial, warfare, struggle. They are always costly.
 1. I remember as a young Christian, I prayed that the Lord would give me a testimony. While praying, God reminded me of what a testimony costs.
 - a) I thought of some of my Christian heroes. I thought of the Viet Nam vet who chose to praise God after having half his face blown off with a phosphorus grenade, or the woman who preached from her wheelchair after being paralyzed for life in a diving accident. I thought of the bold inner city evangelists, routinely threatened and assaulted for simply carrying the gospel of love and hope into dark places.
 - b) Suddenly a testimony didn’t seem so appealing. I didn’t want a testimony, I wanted fame, prestige, and recognition, but at no cost.
 2. **Hebrews 11:35b ESV** Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. **36** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— **38** of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

- B. There is more to having a testimony than enduring hard times, or all of us could claim to have one. Having a testimony means never turning back, regardless of many dangers, toils and snares, fixing our faith in Jesus; in good times and bad.
1. **2 Timothy 3:12 ESV** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Hard times find us all through our own sin, the mistreatment of others, and merely by the fact that we live in a fallen world that is scarred by depravity. It is inevitable, and especially so for Christians.
 2. Hard times are how we are tested, refined, perfected, and made holy. In hard times, we look for alternate routes, or an escape pod to flee our troubles; but faith makes us say our destiny in Christ is over the bridge (or the river). We don't spit the bit, we submit. We don't resort to fight or flight, but to faith. Like poor Job said, **Job 13:15a ESV** Though he slay me, I will hope in him.
- C. The key to having a testimony isn't my great performance, but the fullest confidence in Christ's performance, knowing that he is the one who is parting waters and leading me into the land of my testimony, the land of his promise. He went before us to the cross (the ultimate hard time!), and died in our place to carve out for us a path to the Father. Now we follow him on the same path. **Mark 8:34b ESV** he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Without a cross, there's no crown.
- IV. But even in this life, God answers prayer, brings deliverances, and rains down mercy all the time. When he does, it's important for us to pile up stones, so that we can remember and point back to them, praising God for his faithfulness.
- A. What are the piles of stones in your Christian life?
1. Do you have sacred places? I love to drive by the place in Midland where God saved me. Ginger took me to a spot in Mississippi I had not forgotten where God began a breakthrough in our marriage a few years before.
 2. Do you have sacred words? Of course we have the Word of God, full of promises and assurance. But I am also grateful for the words of wisdom and encouragement I've received from brothers and sisters in Christ that brought healing, deliverance and comfort to my hurting soul when I needed it.
 3. What about sacred prayers? Are there times when you stood toe to toe with the devil and yet trusted in the Lord; when there seemed to be no way, and yet God made a highway in the desert, and provided food in the wilderness?
- B. We should mark those places often in our memories! We should visit them often!
1. Some of you could begin a journal of prayers answered and deliverances wrought by God. When you begin to pay attention, you be amazed at how much God is moving, providing, and speaking in your life.
 2. But even better than journaling those things for yourself it to repeat them often to others: your spouse, your children, your church family, your saved and your unsaved friends, your co-workers, even perfect strangers!
 - a) To declare openly what the Lord has done, to point to your "pile of rocks", is the very essence of praise. It's not just singing in a church!
 - b) **Psalms 145:4 ESV** One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. **5** On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

- C. But a pile of rocks isn't just for you, but so that "One generation can commend your works to another". They stand for generations, so that "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know..." They provide multi-generational proclamation.
1. As families, do we speak openly and often of what the Lord has done? I mean do we often take time to point back for our kids to what God has done as well as asking him to provide what we need for our future?
 - a) This has nothing to do with the age of your children, either. You may be older, with all your kids grown. They still need you to point to piles of stones, even if they are new piles. They need to know that there is God who loves and answers prayer, carrying us through the hardest of times.
 - b) Your kids need to know how Jesus found you, and what he has done for you; what he continues to do for you, and what he means to you, more than they need anything else from you. No inheritance can replace that!
 2. My father is gone, and one of my deepest regrets is that he never told me of any spiritual things that were personally meaningful to him. He took us to church, and we talked about different takes on scripture, but he never let me know that Jesus genuinely mattered to him, or had done anything for him. I don't want to do that to my kids, and you don't either. Pile up stones.
- V. Let me leave you with one last illustration: We met a teacher in Selma who tells the story to tourists for donations to his youth organization. His name was Columbus.
- A. Columbus told us when he was 13 he asked his Uncle Willie (who marched on the Edmund Pettus bridge) if the name "Bloody Sunday" was accurate or exaggerated for PR purposes. Willie's eyes welled up with tears.
 1. He told the young man how he could hear bones breaking under the hooves of horses. He saw rivulets of blood flowing down the bridge. He heard the cries of men and women, and saw those who had been beaten unconscious.
 2. Willie told him of what it meant to be able, through such hardship, to be able to participate democratically, and how he would never take it for granted.
 - B. Willie was piling rocks for a young man that hadn't known the struggle, but could now appreciate what the suffering of others had bought. It instilled courage in Columbus, to keep fighting for what is right, no matter the cost. Willie's testimony means, though Willie is gone, Columbus sees what he saw. That's the power of piling rocks and pointing to them often.
- VI. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **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." **25** 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.
- VII. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."