

Not
one
Failed
Promise.

Life Group Study Series

Joshua: Week Three

30th October 2016

Bible

Joshua 4:1-7 (NIV)

1 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, **3** and 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.”

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, **5** and 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, **6** to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ **7** 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.”

Sermon Summary

In this week's passage the people of Israel cross the Jordan River (under miraculous circumstances) into Canaanite territory. The intriguing thing about the text is that it doesn't contain what we ought to expect; a battle. The last thing that the Canaanites would want to allow would be for the Israelites to cross into their territory uncontested. And yet, that is exactly what happens. In fact, the whole narrative reads more like a religious ceremony than a strategic military manoeuvre! The action centres on the ark of the covenant – the portable throne of God – carried by four priests who lead the people out. When the priests' feet touch the water the flow of water ceased and piled up in a great heap upstream to allow the people to cross on dry ground. The people were to consecrate themselves (prepare for a sacred event) and keep their distance from the ark (as they had kept their distance from the mountain of God). The crossing takes place on the 10th day of the 1st month when preparations were being made for Passover and the entire purpose of the crossing was to confirm the presence of the Lord with Joshua and Israel. Before the priests came up out of the dry river bed, representatives from each tribe of Israel gathered a stone from the middle of the river bed. These stones were set up as a memorial where the Israelites camped that evening and even this memorial had a religious meaning. It was to remind the people of what God had done so that they would always fear him – and remember, that faithfulness to the Lord was the largest threat to the Israelites! But the memorial was also designed to invite questions, "What do these stones mean?" And when the question was asked, the memory of what God had done was to be shared and, as it was shared it also served as a reminder of how they were to live. Imagine a young Israelite boy walking with his father and asking about the stones. As his father shares how the Lord dried up the Jordan the son would hopefully understand why the family worshipped and followed the Lord! Alternatively, he might ask why they were not faithful to the God who can stop a river!

For us, our very lives are to be a memorial. Our lives ought to be organised around what God has done for us; shaping our priorities, values, attitudes and actions. And a life that revolves around what God has done, will inevitably invite questions. And when they ask, tell them what God has done.

Joshua 3-4 serves as another reminder that the main interest of the narrator is the faithfulness of the people and that this is not so much a book of conquest (though that's coming) as it is a book about the struggle to remain faithful; the same struggle we have.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Share a favourite photo (even if you just have to describe it), telling the story behind it and why it's so special.
2. Take a moment to read Joshua chapters 3 + 4. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. Having shared more generally, what are the notably *religious* aspects of the river crossing?
4. The memorial of stones was a reminder to Israel of what God had done, are there times in your lives that you can recall God carrying out a significant shaping work that changed or formed you?
5. Do you have ways that help you remember the work God has done? Take some time to share those with the group.
6. When people ask questions about our lives, they are often more receptive to hearing about the work of God than if we just tell them uninvited. What kind of life and living might invite questions from your friends, family and work colleagues that don't know Jesus? Describe the sorts of attitudes, actions, values and priorities that would be most counter-cultural.

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Pray that the Lord would continue to lead you into a life that invites questions about God's faithfulness.

Extras

To help inform this series, Marc also asks:

1. Next week we will be looking at Joshua 5:1-12. Have a read and please feel free to email Marc with any questions you have about the text.
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