

We live in a rapidly-- changing world... a fickle... unstable and very confusing world... yet... in the midst of this sea of uncertainty... with its constantly changing values and traditions... we have a faithful... **changeless** Lord who is the same yesterday... today... and forever.

Tyler and I have begun a study together... and Monday's reading brought me face to face with this vast amount of change. ... 1985 does not seem that long ago to me... but authors Rick Chromey and Stephanie Caro... took my awareness to that year... to recognize that a generational shift was in the air... Actually... what they describe is more of a cataclysmic cultural earthquake.

In 1985 we were in the midst of the long-gone Reagan revolution... "Baby on Board" signs on the back windshields of minivans... conveyed a new attitude all over the country... and in Portland... Jim and Patti Hofman became first-time parents. The Cosby Show and Family Ties tapped into a cultural nerve. Coke came out with "New Coke" introducing it with a massive media splash. But the public thought it tasted just like Pepsi... The Pepsi-cola company made a big deal of Coke's admission that Pepsi always tasted better... Many Coke fans demanded Coke to change it back... and so they did... "classic Coke" was born. Meanwhile... an upstart company called Apple Macintosh was gaining popularity with a home computer that used a navigating device called a mouse... and then another new company called MicroSoft came out with a versatile computer operating system that could run several programs at the same time... called "windows." Computers were no longer just for "nerds."

In those days television sets and telephones were tethered to cables and chords. No one could even imagine a cell phone “computer that could record an event in high definition video... and then instantly broadcast it all over the world... or receive step by step directions from your exact location to any destination you want to go... even giving you a street view picture of that ending point. ... It was unthinkable to be able to play a video game so realistic that participants actually injure themselves while playing. ... Who could imagine passengers watching movies or live television from your car...? ... (Notice that I said “passengers”...) The common people of third world countries that I have visited... may not live in anything but a broken down shack... but even the poorest of the poor... the masses that I’ve seen in the Philippines... Indonesia... and Colombia... do seem to have cell phones in their possession. I am still amazed at my experience of being in a very remote jungle... among secluded tribe... far removed from civilization... on a small Indonesian island... and watching a Newsboys concert at the tribal chief’s home through a satellite.

Simply looking at how far the entire planet has come since 1985... makes me wonder how much more of this insane... fickle... world... with its constantly changing values... we will be seeing. All of our communication devices... bring us into immediate and close contact with every culture. (And them... with ours...) ... Our world has become flat. Along with this enhanced communication... everyone’s ideas... philosophy... and ideology is instantly accessible... and is readily exchanged. ... The pictures we used to stare at in National Geographic Magazine... of a distant culture... isn’t so alien to us anymore. Nothing seems strange... new... or foreign ... because those cultures have moved-in... next door to us. Our world has

become flat. Pluralism is naturally emerging from all of this. ... The new attitude is: who can say which culture is better... and who has superior beliefs...? Me...? Or my new neighbor...? ... Believing that we are right... and THEY are wrong... was much easier when THEY were a distant... and non-personalized idea to us... (Something we couldn't help to be shocked by... as we stared at those images in National Geographic Magazine.) ... The world is flat. ... It is now... simply a "live... and let live world..."

But... did God simply create the earth and the people to populate it and then walk away and yell out over his shoulder... "*Best of luck! ... By the way... you are welcome to believe whatever you like... And you are actually free to think I don't even exist... if you want. ... I don't care whether you acknowledge Me or not...*"

The issue really isn't – are we right... and other cultures wrong...? ... All of that evaporates... when we recognize that our God is Yahweh... "I AM." He is involved with us... He is personally present... providing all the resources we need to live this life. ... He wants us to remember Him... what He has done... in... and around us... There are solid intellectual answers... that a believer has to answer the issue of our pluralistic world. (Bob and Lin Johnson are hosting a Bible fellowship at their home on Tuesday evenings... where matters like these are being covered.) ... But... let me tell you... an effective antidote is to simply remember what He has done and is doing in our midst. When we don't... it is easy to default into thinking... "*Yeah... Cool! Believe whatever you want... It doesn't really matter...*"

Before we get to this morning's passage in Joshua... let me tell you the two big ideas of this chapter. Joshua chapter 4 highlights two essentials for accomplishing God's mission. Being faithful to the end... and overcoming what may be the greatest enemy to anyone's faith. ... (LISTEN) "The greatest enemy of faith... is... forgetfulness." Not only do I believe this... but I believe it is a main point to our passage this morning. "The greatest enemy of faith is forgetfulness."

Now I have preached messages on how to increase your faith... but let me tell you that there is an enemy that can... and will destroy it... even when our faith is built strong... It is our forgetting what God has done on our behalf.

This morning... we will see the Israelites miraculously get across the Jordan River. ... They get in! They all finally reach the Promised Land that they have anticipated for 40 years. NOW they have an enormous task of driving out the inhabitants before them... but God knew that there was something of far greater importance... than plunging right into the urgent mission that beckoned them.

Driving out their enemies from the Land of Canaan... required steady faith... all the way through to its completion... and beyond. ... So God has them launch a pre-emptive strike against what was perhaps their greatest enemy... their great enemy to faith – "Forgetfulness." ... Also they get a strong reminder about the second big thought of this chapter... the importance of something that often gets over-looked... and isn't often acknowledged because it remains "under the surface" ... and that is...

faithful.... unassuming service. ... So our chapter is about “Forgetfulness” and diligent “Faithfulness.”

We will be encouraged by our passage to take specific action in our lives that will anchor our lives to a relevant faith... as gale storm winds of change and pluralism blow all around us... urging us to believe that God really doesn't care what we believe... and one belief system is just as good as another.

Joshua 4:1-24

Two heaps of stones were set up as memorials of Israel's crossing of the Jordan River: twelve stones at Gilgal (vv. 1-8,10-24), and twelve stones in the midst of the river (v. 9). ... The two heaps were witnesses to miracle that God performed... and to the faithfulness of the priests... who stood the whole time... holding up the Ark of Testimony.

The memorials of 12 stones... were to be constant reminders of the day the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. Their children would see the stones... hear the story... and learn about God. ... Why? Because:

We have a tendency to *forget* God, especially in discouraging times. This is why we are prone to fail God and disobey Him. It is why we are inclined to forsake God and rebel against Him.

Notice that verse one makes it clear that the memorials were not Joshua's idea... “*The LORD said to Joshua... (this is what I want you to do...)* God knows how we are... So He orders for the memorials to be built... after the crossing was completed.

The next thing we should notice is in verse 3... the stones were to be taken from where... (now notice how it is written)... “*where the priest’s feet stood – FIRMLY...*” ... Why is this adverb “firmly” added...? Why doesn’t it simply read... “*Where the priest’s feet stood*”... ? Why does the author emphasize the firmness...? ... Literally this means... they were on firm ground.

The drying of the river bed was so great... that the ground was hard and firm. ... This was a miracle... just as awesome as the water flow stoppage. ... Whenever a stream or pond dries up... it generally takes weeks before the river bed or pond bed ceases to be soft and muddy... and becomes hard and firm. ... To be this dry in an instant was truly a great miracle which many Bible students miss.

The dry ground was not just on the edges of the riverbed... but in the very center... where the bed would be the wettest... and take the longest to dry under normal circumstances. ... God worked a great miracle to dry the river bed especially in the middle of the river... where the priests stood.

The river bed was so dry... that several million walking across the dry river bed... did not cause it to become soft and muddy. ...Just stop and consider that a lot of livestock also crossed the dried river bed... and their crossing did not effect the dryness of the river bed. ... Every farmer knows that a dried up pond in a field becomes a muddy quagmire very quickly... after a few cattle have tramped around on the dried up bed of the pond. ... The hoofs of livestock dig quickly into the river bed or pond bed and stimulate any moisture that is still there and make the river... or pond bed... a sloshy quagmire of mud quickly. ... But... in this crossing of the Jordan... none of

this happened. ... Everyone crossed the Jordan on "*dry ground.*" ... It was a very great miracle. ... All the skeptics who try to explain the stopping of the water by a landslide up the river... always ignore the fact of the needed dry ground for the crossing. ... If God had not dried the river bed miraculously... the Israelites would have had to wait weeks before they could have crossed.

Joshua 4:5

The point to realize from this... is that the stones were supposed to be BIG rocks. ... You don't carry small or medium sized rocks on your shoulder. These were large and heavy.

Joshua 4:6-7

The memorial was for the children and later generations... who would not have experienced the crossing... but who needed to know about it. ... The memorials were to encourage the people of God in training their children spiritually.

Now... if we ever were to need a Scriptural justification... for why we do AWANA at this church... why we have KIDS church... or why we have just brought a Pastor of Student Ministries on staff... our passage today would serve that end... just fine! ... God is telling His people to focus on the next generation... and the next one after that! Whether or not you have kids that will directly benefit from these efforts... THIS is God's idea... These are His instructions for His people – focus on future generations.

We can almost see it now. ... Fifteen years post-Jordan Crossing Time... an Israelite father and his six-year-old son are strolling through Gilgal National Park. ... The lad spots an imposing pile of rocks. ... He counts... “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12...” and then exclaims,... *'Hey, Daddy, what is this pile of river rocks for...?'* The son's curiosity now becomes the occasion for communicating to him the news of Israel's astounding God... and how He unleashed His power for His people.

This pattern of remembering carries over into other areas for the church... (Not just children's and student ministry programs.) ... We continue to remember the utterly unique act of what Jesus did on the cross... through the Lord's Supper. ... Even our children whisper to us as we take the elements, *'What does that mean? What is that? What are you doing?'* And even there we can whisper our brief witness back to them. ... *“This helps us remember what Jesus has done for us... It keeps us thinking about its importance...”* (and then explain further when you get home. *“Uh... Mom! Dad! ... Why is the pastor pushing that person's head under water...? Why is he making them look like a drowned rat...?”* We have some memorials in the form of ceremonies that we do around here... don't we...?

Joshua 4:8

They were faithful to do all that God told them to do. The significance of their compliance is seen as we consider how far they had to carry these massive rocks. They did not just carry them to the river's edge and drop them there. ... Instead they hoisted each bolder up on their shoulder... and carted it to where they lodged that first night... which verses 19 and 20 tell

us... was Gilgal. Gilgal was eight miles from the Jordan River! They could not use a cart... or some type of wheel barrow. ... Think of picking up a large boulder and carrying it all the way from here to the Midstate building. They were faithful to a very difficult task!

But it is really the next verse... (verse 9) that concerns itself with being faithful in serving the Lord.

Joshua 4:9

This is a second memorial that Joshua builds. ... The other is on land... in Gilgal... This one is completely under water. ... Now... this may seem strange to some... because... after all... who but God could see twelve stones heaped together in this riverbed?

The strangeness of this act also comes as we notice that Scripture does not mention that God commanded Joshua to set up this second monument. ...*Was this something that Joshua just decided to do on his own...? Good idea... Lord... so I think that I will build another one... over here! ...*

In light of the fact that the entire chapter's focus seems to be Joshua and the people's faithfulness to God... and God's rewarding them in light of their following His instructions... I think that it is likely that God did ask Joshua to build the submerged memorial. At least... He didn't reproach Joshua for doing it. ... But why...? What is it's purpose...?

Here is what more than one commentator that I read has written:

Whenever the Jewish children asked about the twelve stones at Gilgal, the parents would explain the miracle of the crossing of the river. Then they

would add, "But there's another monument in the middle of the river where the priests stood with the Ark. You can't see it, but it's there. It reminds us that our old life has been buried, and we must live a new life in obedience to the Lord." The children would have to accept this fact by faith; and if they did, it could make a great difference in the way they related to God and to His will for their lives.

The first memorial is one of *sight*... what is seen. The second memorial is one of *faith*... what is not seen.

- *The Death and the Resurrection* of Christ was not seen by us. We accept it by faith.
- *Heaven* has not been seen by us. We accept it by faith. One day our faith will be sight.
- *Hell* has not been seen by us thank God. We too accept this by faith.

I was leaning toward these explanations for the purpose of the underwater memorial... but then I noticed that verse 10 begins with the conjunction – “for.” Verse 10... is explaining what was just said. What was just said...? Joshua built a memorial where the priests stood bearing the Ark.

In other words... Joshua built this memorial... BECAUSE (according to verse 10)... the priests stood there in the midst of the Jordan... while everyone else passed by very... very quickly. The Israelites rushed past them. Verse 10 calls that to our attention with its last phrase... “*The people passed over in haste...*”

But the priests served patiently... and faithfully... an act that even today... is not seen or acknowledged. But Joshua did! And he memorialized it. ...

I think... even though I was unable to find anyone who has written about this... that Joshua made an unseen memorial for an act of service that often goes unseen.

Success is often measured by very visible evidence. ... Successful ministry is defined by so many... by the number of people who come to your class... or Bible study... or program... or church. ... It is measured by all the materials... electronics... gizmos... and things that attract and will WOW! a crowd. ... It is measured by all the high status persons... persons of influence in today's society... that you have coming.

But is this what impresses God...? If our goal is to impress God... to WOW Him... to really make Him pleased... do all these tangibles accomplish it...?

No! ... Well then... what does...? ... In order to WOW the Lord... you must give Him your patient... faithful service.

We might make the measurement of our success to be number-based... or material based... or status-based... But I think success in God's eyes is "Patient... faithful service... in doing the things He has asked..."

Consider with me what these priests did... and why Joshua memorialized it. ... They did not sit down or keep moving. This was not an easy job. They must bear the ark faithfully while the Israelites crossed over.

This would be the hardest part, for the priests had to wait for their removal from the river bed until everyone had crossed over the Jordan. Someone figured that if 2,000 Israelites per minute crossed the Jordan it would take eight hours for a million to cross the Jordan. This does not include the

livestock which would not be the fastest moving bunch. Actually they had to move faster, for the population of Israel was more like two million or more. Whatever the pace, the priests had to stand a long time—at least all day—in the Jordan. This would require much patience in any situation but so much the more with the idea of the waters coming back upon them causing great concern. ... After standing behind this pulpit to preach a Sunday sermon... sometimes I can't wait to sit down. I used to preach two sermons a day... and I was very ready to go home and sit all afternoon. I cannot imagine standing still... all day... AND holding a pole that bore the weight of a wooden box overlaid with gold... that had a fancy lid with two angels on it.

The priests did what God asked them to do. They were patient and faithful. This is God's measurement of success for you and I. Are you successful in God's eyes?

Verses 11-13 fit the context of our lesson to be faithful. I think it is what God wants us to see in verses 9-10 as Joshua made the underwater memorial... and then verses 11-13 present an illustration of contrast. The sons of Reuben... and Gad... and the half tribe of Manasseh... were NOT faithful to their instruction. ... They did go into Canaan... as Moses had asked them... but it wasn't even HALF of who were asked to go. Moses said ALL of your fighting men are to go... and Numbers 26:7, 18, 34... reveal that there were actually 110,580 fighting men. But here we read that only 40,000 crossed into Canaan. More than half stayed in the land Moses gave them on the east side of the river... even though the deal they made with him for the land... was for ALL of them to go.

Joshua 4:14

Joshua is magnified in the battle and God keeps His word. God honors those that patiently and faithfully obey Him. For years Joshua had patiently and faithfully served as the servant to Moses. ... Now he is exalted to a position of honor. ... God does the promoting... exalting... and honoring. Patient and faithful servants will be honored by the Lord one day. We are reminded again that *doing right is more important than being popular*.

The people needed to respect Joshua... for that was necessary for him to be the leader of Israel. ... Elders and pastors also must have the respect of the people if they are to do their tasks. ... Satan loves to get people to disrespect leaders in the church. ... This is why Paul wrote in 1 Tim 5:19...

1 Timothy 5:19 (ESV)

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Paul knew that it is a dangerous thing for grumbling and gossip about elders to exist in the church. God exalted Joshua because respect is absolutely necessary.

Whenever negative things are said about church leadership... or anyone in the church... for that matter... the best thing you can do... is to say to the negative influencer... *“Common I’m going to talk to him about it right now... and since you are the one who told me... it would be best for you to come with me. But if not... I’m still going to discuss this matter with them... as well as where I got this information...”* If we all handled gossip that way... how long do you think it would be... before it is totally wiped out...? There is not a church I know... that does not need this kind of faithful service.

So... how did these memorials work in the long-term...? Were the people of God faithful to use them properly. ... In the excitement of our passage today... seeing them set up... and the purpose for which God had them construct them... I wish that I could tell you that these memorials were a continued success. ... But the truth is... they weren't.

Judges 2:8-12 (ESV)

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.

A university professor noticed a student was about to fall asleep in class. So the teacher asked the student, "What is the greatest problem in our society... ignorance or apathy?" The student replied, "I don't know and I don't care." Such was the case with the people of Israel.

They suffered from apathy and the *Second Generation Syndrome*. The land was partially conquered and the people became content with a partial victory. "*We got some land now!*" was their attitude. "*Why should we bother to get anymore and risk death?*" They became satisfied with second best. They failed because they neglected to fully obey the Word of God. In Joshua, obedience to God's Word played a big role, but in Judges it was hardly mentioned. May we learn from their mistakes.

What are you doing to remember the specific things God is doing in your life...? Do you readily share these victories with others...?

The greatest enemy of faith... is forgetfulness. Just as in a marriage... the real threat to any marriage relationship is the slow process of forgetting. ... It is the gradual failure to remember the preciousness of the other person.

Keep both memories alive. Take purposeful action to do so. In your marriage... talk often about the precious times you have shared together. In your walk with God... make a specific effort to talk about His interactions with your life. Don't buy into the lie that there is such a thing as a private Christianity.

Never on a consistent basis... but from time to time... I have journaled significant events of my life... where God's activity was obvious. I've done this so I can go back and remember... especially in discouraging moments.

A friend of mine use to call each of his entries – “monuments.” He considered his entries to be like these piles of stones we have been reading about. ... And he titled his notebook where he wrote them down – “How to Build A Monumental Faith.”

Our two take-away's from today's passage are... that we must attack the great enemy to our faith (forgetfulness) ... and the greatest way to succeed in God's eyes... the way to WOW God... is to simply be His patient and faithful servant.