



Sermon – 10/08/2023  
Phillip Bethancourt

### **Verses Covered**

*Joshua 4:19 - 24*

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me. We're going to be in Joshua chapter 4 this morning. Joshua chapter 4. And as you turn there, if you're a guest with us, whether you're catching us by video or in the room, welcome home. You've picked an exciting day in the life of our church. Because for the last 2 months, we've been building towards this day, our Celebration Sunday, for our NEXT Initiative. And I imagine, have you ever been in one of those conversations before where somebody's talking to you and you're just thinking in your mind, "Can you just get to the point?" You ever had that before? Well, you're going to have one of those moments with me this morning. I'm just confessing that. Because I know a lot of you just want to know, "Okay, how do we do? What are the results? Where are we at?" And I'm going to make you wait all the way to the end of the message. Because if I don't, you may not listen to anything I have to say. And the reason we want to do that is because we need God's word to tune our hearts to His truth so that we can truly celebrate what He's doing in our midst. You know, the danger in a generosity initiative like this is we could go back to Launch Sunday and as we look at the mountain we're about to try to climb, we look at it and say, "Can we do this?" And then we build some momentum along the way and then we wonder, "Will we do this on our commitment Sunday? Will there be enough?" And now, we're sitting here wondering, "Did we do this?" And here's the danger under it all. When we get to the end of today, when we get to celebrate what God has done through His people, the danger is that we might turn inward and say, "We did this." Rather than upward and say, "He did this." So, reason we start with God's word before our results is because we need it to tune our hearts. In Joshua 4, the people of God in Israel find themselves in a moment just like this for us today. You know, over the last few weeks, we've been doing our series on the Seven Marks of a Next Generation Christian. And last week, it was on mission. This week, it's on joy. And we find Israel in one of those high-point moments of celebration and joy. You see, we'll find that God had just brought them across the Jordan River and into the promised land that they had been waiting for. And it would be a kind of moment where they could look at themselves and say, "We did it. We arrived." But instead, we see them taking attack. Not we did it, but He did it in a way that's going to show us what it should look like in our lives today to be a next-generation church that is filled with joy. So, let's pick up where we're going to start at the end of Joshua 4 beginning in verse 19. We'll read down through the end of the chapter. And here's what Joshua 4 says,

<sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. <sup>21</sup>And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ <sup>22</sup>then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’ <sup>23</sup>For the LORD 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, <sup>24</sup>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.”

So, how did Joshua and Israel get in a moment like this? Well, if you know your Bible, you know that they were stuck in Egypt under oppression and slavery and God brought them out. He brought a Passover that brought about deliverance and then they exited the land through the Red Sea. God made a way where there was no way. He parted the waters and they crossed over dry ground. But the people of God were called to go into the promised land and they sent spies to look at that land who came back with a report that sparked fear rather than faith in their hearts. And they stood at the Jordan like this in a similar moment before looking across at where God wanted to take them and they shrunk back in fear rather than move and faith. And now they find themselves back in a similar spot. But this time, they respond rather than with fear, they respond with faith. And God parts those waters just as He did at the Exodus. They cross over dry ground and now they're on the other side. Now, they've entered into the promised land and those hearts that were once filled with fear are now filled with joy. And what we're going to find this morning in Joshua 4 is that if we want to be a next generation church that is truly filled with joy, there's at least three things that need to be true in our hearts this morning and you'll notice the first one back in verse 19.

We're going to see to begin with that we need to remember what God has done. Remember what God has done. So, what we find here is that there's a pattern in Joshua 4 that shows up still today. That remembering fuels rejoicing. That when they look back on what God has done, as they lay down these stones as a marker, it's a reminder, a remembrance that fuels the rejoicing that is to come. And what should that remembering look like? Well, to start off, we need to remember what God's done in the past. That's why verse 19 tells us,

<sup>19</sup>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.

So, I want you to picture what had just happened. At this time scholars believe that the nation of Israel had grown into a people that was nearly 1 million people in size. They've mustered at the border. And in this moment, we know that the River Jordan which is about the size of the Brazos River was actually swollen because it was flooded during the harvest season. It would have been treacherous for these people to cross over the Jordan. But what does God tell them to do? He says, take the priest, have them carry the Ark of the Covenant, which is the, the, the signpost of God's presence, and once the priests step into the water, the water will stop, the land will dry, and the people will come across on dry ground. And just imagine, when Joshua brought those priests together and said, “Okay guys, here's the plan. You're going to take up the most valuable thing we have, and you're going to walk out into this raging river and we're going to hope for the best, because we think that's what God wants us to do.” Can you imagine that first step in that sandal as they touch the water and it began to swirl around them. But the moment those shoes hit the the

waterfront, it begins to stop. The Bible tells us that the water built up like a heap upstream of them. And think about it, when they pass over the land, they don't trudge through mud. The text tells us they walk over on dry ground. It's a sign that God has done this. He's done something miraculous. He stopped the waters. He's made wet soil dry and His people, who couldn't make a way for themselves, now have a way. And what happens we find in verse 20 is it shows us that we don't just remember what God has done in the past. We do it in a way where we can remember what God has done in the future. So, how does that work for Israel? Look at verse 20.

<sup>20</sup>And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal.

And so the Lord is calling them to mark this miraculous moment in their lives. And what had happened is he called Joshua called together one leader from all twelve tribes of Israel and he told them, as you're passing through this dry ground, you are to pick up a stone, hoist it on your shoulder, haul it across onto the promise land, and then with those stones, Joshua constructs this monument. These stones of remembrance. And why does he do this? Because God knows that over time, our memories tend to fade. We forget about the significance of what He's done in the past in a way that causes us to forget about it in the future. And you can't fully celebrate what you don't fully remember. And so, they've set up these stones. And stones are not something unique only to this passage in the Bible. We see time after time that stones play a significant role in the unfolding story of Scripture. So, you have it here in the marking of this monument. In 1 Samuel 7, God delivers His people from the Philistines and they build a stone monument out of Ebenezer stones. Did you remember when we just saying, Come Thou Fount? It says, here I raise my Ebenezer. And you're like, what what is that? Well, Ebenezer in the original language mean stones of help. That they're setting up these stones in 1 Samuel 7 for the same reason they're doing it here. To remind them that God helped them when they had no way to help themselves. But God keeps moving and stones are still a part of it. You step into the New Testament and how is Jesus described in 1 Peter 2? As a stone. But not just any kind of stone. What kind of stone is it? The chief cornerstone. The one who was rejected by men so that we could be rescued. And that that same passage describes you and me that have trusted in Jesus for salvation as living stones. And so now, when we remember the rescue of God in our lives, it's not through setting up dead stones in our midst. It's by living that life as living stones that reflect what He's already done for us.

I think about the life of this church and we've spent a lot of time over these last few weeks looking back at our history. And one of the people that you've heard me share about on several occasions was a man named Roy Holloman, the founding pastor of our church. And I want you to see a picture of him from the 1970s up on the screens right now. And what you're going to see is Roy Holloman standing next to a man I want to introduce to you today. So Roy Holloman served as our pastor Emeritus in the 70s and next to him in that white is our pastor from the 1970s. A man named Duane Riley. Now, why do I bring up Duane Riley to you? He was the pastor of our church on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And just this past week, I was able to grab breakfast with Duane Riley's son, Mark in the Dallas area. He's a retired pastor there and he told me some about what was happening in the life of our church when his dad was serving here as pastor for those eight or nine years. And what he told me, blew me away. He said, Philip, "When my dad came as pastor in 1971, Central was probably just a few years away from having to close its doors. We had lost people. We had lost momentum. We had lost finances. It didn't seem like there was a way forward. But where man couldn't see a way, God made a way. And in the 1970s in the height of

the Jesus movement, Duane Riley came from the epicenter of that in Southern California. And God kept moving in a similar way right here in the Brazos Valley. And what happened is that Duane was raising Mark and his other siblings who were all around middle school and high school age and here's what blew me away. Do you know what turned the tide for our church? What happened was Duane Riley helped us to shift our focus away from ourselves and on to the next generation. They began to invest in reaching middle school and high school students. And they saw kids coming to faith. They saw families coming to be discipled. And the Lord used that to breathe new life into this church. Through a next generation focus. And get this, when he hosted that 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and that picture that you saw is from that 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, don't expect me to wearing something like that on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary by the way, but in that moment, here's what's what blew me away. In that time period, they had a next generation focus on reaching middle school and high school students. They sought to pay off their debt while also renovating their space so they could more faithfully mobilize their people. Doesn't that sound familiar? Isn't that what we're seeking to do again right now 50 years later? And we want to remember what God has done in the past because it's going to ready us for what He's going to do in the future.

Which takes us back to this passage in Joshua 4. Because Joshua anticipates a question that may come up from the next generation in the future about what God is doing in the present. And that's going to bring us to a second thing that we need to do as we celebrate this morning. We don't want to just remember what God has done. We want to rejoice in what God has done. To rejoice in what God has done. We'll see that down in verse 21. But Let me ask you, have you ever been out on a vacation with your family and you had such a great experience there that you wanted to buy a T-shirt to remember the moment? And maybe when you went skiing and it says Breckenridge, Colorado. Maybe you went down to the Bahamas and you got one that says the Bahamas. Maybe you're just driving across Texas on spring break and you got one that said, Bucee's. It could be anything. Well, I wonder in a moment like this if Joshua was tempted to have shirts printed that said, Gilgal. And Gilgal was the place that they had come to you. See that name back in verse 19. If you were to look ahead in Joshua 5, you would find the significance of that word. Gilgal, according to Joshua 5:9, is the word to roll. And what Joshua 5:9 tells us is that they name this place Gilgal because finally, God had rolled away the shame of Egypt upon His people. That longing to go back, that longing to be in slavery. It was now gone as they entered into the promised land. And in that moment, everything changes. They move not just into a time period where they're called to remember but also to rejoice. And the way we see them rejoicing then can show us what it looks like to rejoice today. You'll find down in verse 21 that they are called to rejoice in the miracle of God. So it says there ,

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

Now, notice, he doesn't say, if your children ask in verse 21, but when they ask. I guess kids were full of questions back then too. And he knows those questions will come. How do we answer them? And what he says is, you'll answer them by pointing them back to the miracle of God. To help them to see and to know, that God did this. What we couldn't do on our own, he made a way for us. And so those stones that they brought out of the river were also intended to bring doubt out of their hearts. To help them recognize and rejoice in God's work in their life. But what we find

here is that our calling is not just to rejoice in the miracle of God but also the God of the miracle. God's the one that did this. So, look what he says there in verse 23.

<sup>23</sup>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,

So, God, Joshua doesn't call them to just rejoice in what God has done but in who He is. Not just in His activity but His identity. Because this isn't a one off for God. In fact, the way that Joshua is speaking about this moment, he's showing us. This is like a second Exodus that's taken place. That the God who brought deliverance for Israel out of Egypt is the God that's bringing rescue to deliver them into the promise land. He is the God of the miracle. The one who provides when we have no provision. The one who makes a way when we have no way. The one that brings hope when it seems as if there's no hope. That same God is at work today. And He calls us to remember and to rejoice in the moment. And how did Israel do this. So, they took these 12 large stones from the river, hoisted them on their shoulder, they brought them to dry ground. And we don't know exactly how Joshua constructed it but the whole purpose of those stones was so that when the people looked at them, they could remember what God had done in the past and rejoice in the God of the miracle in the present. Now, you and I know that over the last 2 months, we put a lot of focus on our NEXT Initiative. And as we move forward, we are standing at a providential moment in the life of our church. Why? Because today, on October 8<sup>th</sup> of 2023 we stand at exactly 100 weeks before our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. 100 weeks. And we're not going to keep our focus on NEXT with the same intensity as we have over the last eight, over the next 100. But we also don't want to lose sight or lose remembrance of what God is doing. And so, one of the things that we're going to do each week, we're not going to start building a stack of stones, but if you were here with us on our launch Sunday, I rolled down a picture right in front of this pulpit. It was an image of our church from the 1940s. And we passed out puzzle pieces to everybody in this congregation. I've heard people here tell me that you put 'em on your mirror in your bathroom, on your desk at work, on your kitchen sink right above it there. You've, and the challenge was we want you to pray about and pursue how God is leading you to be a piece of the puzzle at Central. So, what we're going to do as a way to remember and to rejoice over these next 100 weeks in the lead up to this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary is we get a chance to place a piece of the puzzle each week. So, I have in my hand just an example of one of those large puzzle pieces and perhaps over here on the side of the stage in the darkness, you can see where we'll start building that puzzle. And we'll place a piece of this puzzle every week. During the response song, a family in our church starting this Sunday with Dean and Kathy Gage, will place that there for us in a moment of remembrance that will stir our rejoicing as we anticipate what God is going to do in the future. What He called Israel to do through these stones, we're going to keep doing with these puzzle pieces over these next 100 weeks in anticipation of what He's going to do on that 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Which brings us to the last piece of this text down in verse 24. There's one more thing we've gotta see before we talk about what God has done through your generosity and it's this, that we need to reflect what God has done. And notice, I don't say reflect on, like look back and remember. I mean reflect like as a mirror reflects light. As it reflects what's happened in a way that brings light and life to what it reflects it onto. We're called towards reflecting what God has done in the past in and through our own lives. He calls Israel to that in this moment. He challenges us towards that today. And what we find here is that Joshua 4. verse 24 is going to show us that yes, this passage highlights the miracle of God but it also points us to the mission of God. And that mission

is to take His truth, His word, His Son to the lost and dying world that's around us. And the way that we reflect that by living out our mission as a church is we need to embody at least two things in our efforts to reflect this Gospel. We want to reflect the power of God. That's why the start of verse 24 says,

<sup>24</sup>so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty,

In other words, Joshua is making it clear. This moment for Israel is not just for their benefit but for all peoples in the world around them. What God has done for His people is designed to be reflected to all people. And what's to be reflected? This mighty hand of the Lord. This great power that He has displayed in His people. They are supposed to and called to reflect that to the people around them who don't yet know Jesus. And we see that power on display in the way that God overcomes the challenges they face in this moment. So, we know He overcomes the waters. Those raging waters of that swollen river that's at flood stage there at the Jordan. He stops those. He dries up the ground. He builds them up to a heap. But He overcomes even more than that. He doesn't just overcome the unstable waters of the river. He overcomes the unstable waters of their hearts and their doubts. Where they had previously been in a place like this and responded in fear that caused them to step back. Now, those hearts have been overcome and they move forward in faith and trust in the power of God. That's the way He works time and time again. And maybe you find yourself in a moment this morning where you are filled with anxiety, with doubt, and uncertainty. What this passage reminds us of here is that the same God who was on the move then, the same God working in power at that point is the same God that's at work in your life today. And He's calling us to reflect that power no matter what situation we find ourselves in.

But there's another thing we're called to reflect here; not just the power of God but also the purpose of God. And we'll see that in the second half of verse 24. It says,

that you may fear the Lord your God forever.

In other words, the miracle doesn't just reveal God's power to the world, it reveals His purpose to His people. And what is that purpose? It's to fear Him. To follow Him faithfully. That when you see a God this big that can do things this great, the only response you can have is surrender to follow Him, to fear Him, to put your hope and your trust in Him. And He is calling Israel to reflect that as a start this next chapter of their lives at this place named Gilgal. I want you to look back at verse 19 with me for a minute. There may be something you might have overlooked there that is of deep significance. We talked about the place that Israel came to in Gilgal and how it rolled the the shame of Egypt away from them. But did you notice when this all happened? Look at the start of verse 19. It says, the people came up out of the Jordan when? On the tenth day of the first month. Now, why is that important? Well, if you know your Bible well, if you know the story of Israel, you would recognize that the tenth day of the first month is also the day that the Passover began for Israel when they were in Egypt. When they took those those that that livestock and slaughtered it. They painted the blood over the doorpost so that the angel of the Lord would pass over them and spare their life. So, think about it. On the day the passover began, their deliverance into the promised land begins. And how does it happen? It happens through a repetition of what took place in the Exodus, this second Exodus where God parts the waters. And right here embedded in this passage is this amazing picture of the Gospel. Because there's no greater miracle in human history, there's no other place where God's power and His purpose come together quite



like in the death and resurrection of Christ. And think about what takes place. Jesus comes as a new and better Joshua. He's the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He comes through the waters of judgement. Leading a new Exodus so that He might take the people of God from fear to faith, from death to life, by passing through the waters of judgement and welcoming us in to a promised land. And the question we all need to wrestle with this morning is which side of the river are you on? Which side of the river are you on? Are you on this side of the river trying to find a way to make it across to the promised land yourself? Trying to see if you can build bridges back to God to make your way to heaven through your good works. To earn your way there. Or have you instead recognize that that river is so swollen with your sin, that there's no way you're going to make it across on your own. But that God loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die in your place. To pay the penalty you owed. To part the waters of your judgment so that you could walk across on dry ground. That's the invitation of the Gospel to each of us this morning as we prepare for this big moment of celebration. You know, I told you about our pastor from the 1970s, Duane Riley. I had a chance to have breakfast as I mentioned with his son not long ago. And the, one of the things that blew me away from our conversation is that this pastor from 50 years ago the life of our church is still alive today. Get this, he's in his early nineties. He lives up in Oklahoma City. He spent decades pastoring other churches. And it just so turned out that the day after I was with Mark at breakfast, he was heading up to Oklahoma City to visit his dad. And I got an exciting message from Mark after that weekend when he was up there, saying that he had talked to his dad about our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and he's so excited about what God is doing here at Central that he wanted to record a video just for us to express that excitement. Let's take a moment now and check out what pastor Riley has to say to us this morning.

Hello, name is Duane Riley and this is my Central story. The Lord called me to preach when I was but a lad and He has allowed me to be pastor of ten wonderful churches over a period of my lifetime. And I would say that pastoring the great Central Baptist Church of Bryan, Texas, has been the highlight of my ministry. The most significant thing about doing so was just the honor and the privilege of being called as your pastor. I want to offer my congratulations to you on this magnificent occasion. 100 years celebrating the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I look back over those ten full-time churches where I pastored, Central Baptist Church of Bryan, Texas is right there at the top of the list my all-time favorite. Thank you so much for the honor and the privilege of serving as your pastor during that time. And may God bless you as you look forward to the next 100 years.

How great is that? Oh, I love it. I'm like, I want to be like him when I grow up. Just that warmth of spirit and just encouraging to know that this church made a mark on him as he made such a mark on us. Hey, so now the moment's arrived. Are you all ready for it? I've invited some friends from across the church to come up here and help me in just a moment. And what they're going to do is take some time and reveal this number of your generous commitment. But before we get to turn these cards, I want to draw your attention back to the screens to celebrate some other amazing things God has done. This this first image I want you to see on the screen is the results from our Mobilization Sunday last week. Just so you can see all the ways that God was at work. We've had over 400 of you write down the names of people that don't yet know Jesus that you want to pursue in Gospel relationships. And you can see all the different next steps that people indicated. We had over 1,000 next steps indicated by people in our church of areas they want to pray about stepping into to advance the mission of God. Doesn't that encourage you this morning? Yeah. In addition to that, you'll see on this next screen, some of the financial results that have

come up. We, over the course of this giving initiative have had 411 families in our church commit to give. Our prayer was that we would have 313 or more. And God has blown that away. And what's happened as a result of that is that the experts will tell you that a church like ours will have about 48% of its of giving families participate in an initiative like this. But we've had 63% of you step up including we've had 46 of you as first-time givers that have never given in the life of the church committing to give here. Can y'all take a minute to celebrate those first-time givers? Now, we encouraged you to bring a first fruit offering over these last few weeks. You know, we're doing this with no new debt as we pay as we go and so that seed money will help us begin. And what the outside consultants would tell you is that in a normal generosity initiative, your people will usually give about \$1 million dollars or about 20% of their overall target, which for us will be \$1 million. But check out this number on the screen. We've seen you already give \$1,786,807. Doesn't that encourage you this morning? So, now is the moment. And in this moment, the focus is not on ourselves, it's on our Lord. He is the one that gets the glory. He's the one that gets the credit. And so I'm going to invite our friends up here to turn these poster board cards one at a time. And I know a place like us knows how to celebrate. So, I'm going to invite you to stand to your feet now as we get ready to celebrate this. We're going to see this number. Then, I'm going to pray over us. We're going to have a time of response after that. And if you want to rejoice in what the Lord is doing, let's turn our attention to these poster boards now.

Wow! How about that, Central family? Not look at what we did, look at what He did. \$7,476,000. The Lord's going to use that to fuel the next generation impact of this church. And I hope you feel this moment. Because it probably feels a bit like the way that Israel felt there as they had passed over onto dry ground and into the promised land where there's this excitement that what is to come but what they didn't realize is that Jericho was coming next. But get this. The same God that brought them across the river was going to be the same God that met them in the battle and brought the victory. And we're trusting this morning that the same God that brought us to this moment will bring us forward in the battle as we take the Gospel to the next generation.

So, let's pray together and then we'll respond as the Lord leads you this morning.

Father, we come with grateful hearts. Blown away by how You've moved in the lives of our people. The way that You've strengthen us for the next chapter of this church. And I pray for every person in this room. Whether they jumped into this yet or not, that You would help us be of one heart and one mind, united together for the faith of the Gospel, united together for the mission that You've called us to, Lord. We know that You're a God who can do abundantly more than we ask or imagine. We see it in moments just like this. And the prayer of our hearts today as we ready ourselves to rejoice in our response. That You get the credit, You get the honor, You get the glory. And we give it all to You in Christ's name. And we pray this in His name. Amen.