

## Living Offensively: Remembering

*Joshua 4:1-24*

Originally known as Decoration Day, Memorial Day began with an idea from General John Logan, to honor the fallen soldiers of the Civil War. The first celebration on May 30, 1868, was held at Arlington National Cemetery with a crowd of 5,000 people decorating the graves of over 20,000 military personnel with flowers. Various Washington officials presided over the ceremonies. After speeches, children from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphan Home, among others, made their way through the cemetery, spreading flowers on both Union and Confederate graves, reciting prayers, and singing hymns. After World War I it was expanded to honor all veterans who died in any American war. In 1971, Decoration Day became officially known as Memorial Day and Congress passed an act declaring it a national holiday.

### I. Living offensively requires remembering the right things; 4:1-10.

*<sup>1</sup> When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup> "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, <sup>3</sup> and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." <sup>4</sup> So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. <sup>9</sup> Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day. <sup>10</sup> Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over,*

God commands Joshua to pick out twelve men, one from each tribe. Joshua instructs the men to pass before the ark into the midst of the Jordan and to take a stone from there. He explained that the number twelve corresponded to the number of tribes of Israel. The men are to carry twelve stones from the spot where the priests' feet rested in the dry Jordan and deliver them to Israel's next campsite. The stones' purpose was to be a testimony and a memorial to Israel's descendants that God had worked a great miracle in stopping the waters of the Jordan.

Memories are powerful motivators for good and bad. We remember what we talk about and think about the most. What are three significant times God has revealed Himself to you? Will you tell someone today? What in your life causes your children, grandchildren, and others to ask questions that allow you to point them to God?

## **II. Living offensively requires continued obedience; 4:11-14.**

*<sup>11</sup> and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the LORD and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. <sup>12</sup> The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, armed, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. <sup>13</sup> About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war. <sup>14</sup> That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.*

The ark and the priests cross over as the people watch from the west bank. The story singles out the crossing of Israel's vanguard, the fully-armed east-Jordan tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh). Their crossing confirms that they kept their earlier promise to Moses and signals that a united, obedient Israel has, indeed, entered Canaan. Joshua's words were consistently obeyed; and, most especially, when he told the people what was going to happen to the waters of the Jordan (3:13). It happened precisely the way he predicted. As a result, the people revered him all the days of his life, just as they had Moses.

Our obedience to God and His Word is the soil that the mighty acts of God grow in our lives as we live offensively. Without obedience, we remember heartache, failure, and loss.

## **III. Living offensively requires no retreat; 4:15-18.**

<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>16</sup> "Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan." <sup>17</sup> So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." <sup>18</sup> And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

The final stage in the miracle of the crossing was the priests' leaving the Jordan riverbed and the waters returned to their flood stage the moment the priests feet touched the dry ground.

Retreating, going back to old lifestyles, and old ways of dealing with stress are not options for believers who want to live offensively (being who God has called them to be).

#### **IV. Living offensively requires keeping the memory alive; 4:19-24.**

<sup>19</sup> On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. <sup>20</sup> And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. <sup>21</sup> He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup> tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' <sup>23</sup> For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. <sup>24</sup> He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."

The Israelites encamped at Gilgal, just east of Jericho in the Jordan Valley. Joshua now erected the stones that the twelve men had brought up out of the Jordan River as a memorial, in a permanent site, at Gilgal. The miracle was performed for a greater purpose than merely getting the Israelites across the Jordan River. It was to be a sign to all peoples that God himself was mighty, that is, evidence to His greatness. The miracle was so amazing that it should call forth such a response from God's people.

It takes work and intentionality to keep the correct memories that motivate us to live offensively for Jesus, impacting our world for Him. It's in the stories we tell and the things that we think about. They must be the things that God has done for humanity and for you. The purpose of remembering is not to relive

your glory days or to bemoan the good-ole-days now gone, but to motivate us to live offensively today, knowing God is still at work.

A cluttered mind makes us forget things which matter most, including our walk with Christ. Joshua erected twelve stones at Gilgal so that future Israelite generations would remember what had happened there. He wanted Israel not to forget an astounding miracle-that Israel had entered Canaan on dry ground because God stopped the Jordan's flow. Remembering that miracle would remind Israel of the unstoppable might of their warrior God and challenge them to reaffirm His sovereignty over their lives. It would drive them back to a firm, steady, convinced, and life-altering fear of Him.

Of prime importance for Christians is the atoning death of Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper, He declared, "This is my body given for you" (Luke 22:19). But he adds, "Do this in remembrance of me," thereby instituting what we now practice as communion. We are to remember the historical events behind the Lord's Supper as part of our observance of it.