

## Christianity in America 2024

### Remember the Stones

Lt. (Ret.) Pete Sniffin

Thank you for the opportunity to come and share from God's Word with you tonight. And thank you for the nature of this service. You know, we are a gathering of reformed people, so we know that, the Lord teaches us in Philippians 3 that our citizenship ultimately is in heaven, but our God is sovereign. He does things intentionally, and he put each of us in this country. And I can tell you, it doesn't take but 15 seconds in a place like Iraq or Afghanistan to know that that is an enormous blessing. It is an enormous blessing to be an American. And we are people called to count our blessings. When I got to the hotel room yesterday, looking at my social media and there was a quote from Elizabeth Elliot said, ***Let Thanksgiving be the habit of your life***. And this annual service is part of that habit of Thanksgiving. So good on you, Briarwood Church. Thank you for doing this.

My wife and I, we live in basically the middle of Pennsylvania right now, and if you get on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and drive about 100 miles east, and it's at night suddenly off to the left, you will see a massive stone arch illuminated. And that is the National Memorial Arch that stands right in the middle of the Valley Forge National Park, built to commemorate the young men and their leader who suffered, starved, endured sickness and froze through a brutal winter, only to emerge in the spring to begin a march to victory so unlikely that only Providence could provide it. These words are inscribed on the stones of that arch.

*And here, in this place of sacrifice, in this vale of humiliation, in this valley of the shadow of that death, out of which the life of America rose, regenerate and free, let us leave with an abiding faith. That to them union will seem as dear, and liberty as sweet, and progress as glorious as they were to our fathers, and are to you and me, and that the institutions which have made us happy, preserved by the virtue of our children, shall bless the remotest generation to time to come.*

And here we are now, and we are that remote generation. Heirs of freedom earned by the selfless servants of our heritage. And in any nation, especially during the eras of division, it's important to go back to the stones and remember the realities that they stand to Revere. It's important for citizens to remember. And it's important for Christians to remember, which is the point of our passage this evening. I'm going to read to you now from Joshua 4:1-7.

*When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, take 12 men from the people from each tribe a man, and command them, saying, take 12 stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.*

*Then Joshua called the 12 men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed a man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be assigned among you.*

*When your children ask in time to come, what do these stones mean to you? Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.*

The word of the Lord.

We learn in that text that God emphasizes the importance of remembrance with an invested amount of inspiration. Now we are Bible people. We know what Paul tells us about inspiration. We know. That this book is inspired, that all Scripture is read out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work front to back, all of it inspired.

But here God gives two entire chapters. To the crossing of the Jordan. And in this chapter, chapter four, he's going to talk twice about the Remembrance Stones. For perspective, a few weeks ago I heard a very good sermon on the subject of the millennium. Now the millennium, there's all kinds of views Christians have. Christians talk about this stuff all the time, but it's interesting to remember that the millennium, the whole entire subject, comes from three verses in one chapter of the Bible. And this very good sermon went on for 42 minutes. Imagine if that preacher had two entire chapters. That sermon would still be going on. Our God made a special spiritual investment of inspiration here to teach us that remembrance is essential. In college, you learn the most about what you major in. Theoretically. God is teaching us here that remembrance is a major for the Christian. God's people need an active memory.

Our text also teaches us that God just doesn't invest in Christian remembrance. He requires it. He requires it. When you receive a syllabus in your college course or your seminary course, it lists required readings and sometimes it lists suggested readings. Now, my wife is with me tonight, Rosemary. She's one of those people that does all of those readings.

Okay, based on thinking back to that proverb this morning, then the blessing of a wife, one of the reasons I'm blessed is my wife has done all the readings in life. But there's my wife, and then there's everybody else. And in verses two and three it says, take. And that word is an imperative. That word is a command.

Take these stones. God commands it because he knows it's essential for us. Scripture is so full of the subject and the importance of remembrance that God even calls himself to it. If you go back to Genesis chapter nine, where a rainbow first appears in the sky, the Lord says in his word, when the bow is in the clouds, I will see it, and I will remember.

Remembrance is important. The truth is, if Christians didn't forget so much, Christians wouldn't worry so much. God is always faithful. He never changes. Nothing is impossible for our God and he works all things for our good. We worry because we don't remember that.

God is pointing out here, if we are to be people who glorify God and enjoy him forever, we need to be people with active memory. And in doing so, we reinforce our faith in our unwavering, ever present, always faithful God.

I am a football fan. I knew I was back in the South today when at lunch some nice people who took us to lunch. It was the wife who asked me who my favorite football team was.

But a few years ago, I was watching a game. This was an NFL game. And, Hall of Fame quarterback Peyton Manning threw a touchdown pass to his All-Pro receiver, Reggie Wayne in the corner of the end zone. And what was unique about this was Peyton was under incredible pressure. He was actually being tackled when he threw this pass, and he could not see Reggie Wayne when he threw that pass. And afterwards, in the postgame interview, they asked him about that dynamic and this was his reply. He said to the interviewer, I've thrown that ball to Reggie a thousand times in practice. I trust Reggie to be there.

Amid our great pressures, when we cannot see the solution, remember, remember, the guy has been there a thousand times before that. He is unchanging, that he will be there again and again and again. And when you remember, you will throw deep in faith. Remember and trust God. And the reality is that will not always be easy. In verses 12 and 13, a little bit beyond where we read.

It says, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh passed over, armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. About 40,000 ready for war. Passed over before the Lord for battle. These are the people of God passing into their promised land, and it's a war zone. And war zones are dangerous and hard places and life is a hard and dangerous place.

So our Savior told us. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart. I have overcome the world. God knows it's hard. He calls us to remember his faithfulness, his strength, his ability to make a way where there is no way. Remember that life is a battle, but God is a warrior.

The battle is Lord. Life is a battle. The God is its victor. And God commands us to active remembrance, because there's strength for the battle and the truth of his faithfulness.

Our text tells us it's important. To remember to save our children's future.

In verses six and 21, the question is asked when your children ask in time to come, what do these stones mean? There's an emphasis on the activity of the children.

What do these stones mean? Is the question. And research shows they don't know the answer. LifeWay research. Every couple of years does a study of the state of theology and spiritual life in

the church. It's always miserable. And young people today it finds they believe that being spiritual is more important than having a particular Christian faith, that 65% of them don't pray regularly, but 65% of them don't regularly attend worship. Almost 70% don't ever read Scripture. Over 50% don't believe that Jesus is the way to heaven.

Those are urgent spiritual metrics. Former President Reagan, he once noted this freedom is never more than one generation from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, handed on for them to do the same. Or one day or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States, where men were free.

National freedom is costly and it's fragile, and it must be actively preserved. That's why a night like this, and the effort of this choir and this orchestra are so important. And your presence, it must be actively preserved. But you know what else? Spiritual freedom is also costly and fragile and must be actively preserved. We're in Joshua and in judges 2:8 it says this. And Joshua the son of nun, the servant of the Lord, died at 110 years. And then down in verse ten, and all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. Now listen closely. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel.

One generation later, 30 pages later in the Bible. It's urgent. Urgent.

As I said, I'm a sports guy. And in eight weeks, college football will be back. Praise the Lord! For the last eight years my family, we load either in deep SEC territory or deep Big Ten territory, and folks pass along to their kids. Huge alliances devoted reasons why their team and their conference are superior. I don't know if you have that here in Alabama. 😊

Now, I love college sports, so I'm all for that. And in so many ways we teach our kids loyalties. We teach our kids rights and wrongs. We teach our kids standards. We raise them right so that they, we hope, have a great future. But if we don't teach them the answer to the question, what do those stones mean?

We will lose them in all the ways that eternally important.

So parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and elders, what's around your house and in your life that serves as a reminder that would cause a child or a young person to say to you, what's that in your life mean?

God calls all leaders to intentional remembrance. Why? So that 30 pages later from now, when the history of your family, there's a generation that knows the Lord.

No, you may not know. Today how God will bring members of that future generation to himself, but, you know, the thing is, the people of Israel very likely had no idea how they were going to get across the Jordan 15 minutes before it happened. God made a way. And memorials remind us that God, our God, is mighty to say.

The parting of the Jordan was God making a way where there was no way.

Do you have somebody new? Life that you love and you're not sure how that person will ever get right with the Lord? Remind yourself what the stones mean. God is mighty to save. God delivers people from their wilderness to their promised land by opening a passage only he can open. God is mighty to say.

Back in December of 2006, I went to a memorial service for a soldier. He was a soldier that was born on the 14th of June, and that's the army's birthday. When he was in kindergarten, his kindergarten teacher gave the class an assignment. When I grow up, I want to be fill in the blank. And he wrote an army man, and he became an army man.

But he died at 19.

Ross McGinnis was riding in the turret of an armored Humvee, manning a 50 caliber machine gun, when an insurgent threw a hand grenade at that Humvee, and miraculously, it went in the turret and into the vehicle.

And Ross was suddenly the only person in a position to leap to safety from that blast. But he was also the only person that knew the location of that grenade. So in that moment, Ross's decision was to throw himself downward into the vehicle.

On top of the grenade and absorb it so that the other four inside could live.

And for that, Ross posthumously received the Medal of Honor. Now, when a soldier receives a medal of honor, there's an official ceremony at the white House. And then the next day, there is another ceremony at the Pentagon. And at that ceremony at the Pentagon, the four men that Ross saved were seated right up front. Ron Ross's father got up to speak.

This is what you just said in his remarks. It's been said Ross gave these four men a gift, and that's what it was. They can't be expected to live the rest of their lives living up to something or paying back something. It can't be carried as a debt. A debt is something you can repay. A gift is something for you to enjoy.

So live your lives. Enjoy your lives because it was a gift. Ross is the reason we are here and the reason that Ross is not here. Is because his army buddies were more important than life itself.

What a beautiful thing for a father to say. What a beautiful thing for a father to say to those whose only hope of salvation was his son.

This evening what is the father's message to you?

In Romans 3, he tells you your only option is death. Without him taking action. In Philippians 2, he reminds you that Jesus was in the position of ultimate security. But he threw himself down to earth to save you. And Ephesians two he reminds us. That salvation, your salvation is a gift. In John 3:16 he tells us the most beautiful message the father ever says.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Think about that hymn we sang this morning.  
How deep the father's love for us,  
how vast beyond all measure  
that he should take his only son  
to make a wretch his treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss.  
The father turns his face away.  
As wounds which marred the Chosen one  
bring many sons to glory.

As wounds that marred the Chosen One bring you to glory. That's the father's message. Can you hear him? Can you hear him now?

You may not know how salvation is going to come to your house and to those you pray for, and you may not know how God will deliver you from the wilderness that you or your family might be in currently. But remember this he is a beautiful father. And he is mighty to say, keep reminding you yourself what the stones mean.

Be firm in your faith and watch our beautiful father do more than you can hope or even dare to imagine. The stones mean our beautiful father is mighty to save. Remember that. Let's pray. Heavenly father.

Thank you. If you were not mighty to save, none of us would be here today. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your mercy. Thank you for your goodness. Thank you for your faithfulness. That will never change. Thank you that nothing is impossible for you and that you turn all things to our good. Give us faith. Help us to be faithful and to teach our children what the stones mean.

And the quiet of us. Quietness of our own heart. Help us to remember every day that you're a beautiful father and you're mighty to say Amen.