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*A Memorial to Fulfilled Promises (Joshua 4:1-9)*  
*9/10/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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A sociologist working with prisoners was intrigued when he found that 4 inmates with different last names were actually blood relatives. As he broadened his study, he kept finding members of this family whom he called the “Jukes.” Eventually, he found records of one of the great grandfathers of this entire Jukes family: a man he called Max. The sociologist claimed that Max was the direct ancestor of over 76 convicted criminals, 18 brothel-keepers, 120 prostitutes, and over 200 relief recipients.

These studies really show both the impact of our past and the consequences of our actions, not only for us, but for those who come after us. You and I can thank our culture and our family for much of the way we think and live. For most of us, the greatest impact we will have on the world is what we pass on to the generations that follow us. Max’s influence on his descendants had a devastating effect on his descendants and even on people he never met. His life certainly wasn’t the only factor but it is a clear connection. We all need to pay close attention to what we have received and to what we pass on.

Today, as we talk about the stone memorial that Joshua set up for the Israelites, we are reminded that we aren’t the only Christians. The gospel message that Jesus Christ has saved us from sin, death, and the devil; the message of the hope we have that heaven is our eternal home, because Christ earned it for us even though we fall far short of it; that message is the same gospel message that has been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. There’s so much we can learn from our ancestors in the faith. We do well to honor and learn about those who went before us. And unless Christ comes during our lifetime, we also have the privilege and duty of passing that same gospel message on to those who come after us. As we look at Joshua, chapter 4, our God shows us a Memorial to Fulfilled Promises.

In Joshua 4, God has just brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. Over 500 years earlier, God had promised Abraham 4 things: 1) that 100-year-old Abraham and his barren wife would have a son, 2) that Abraham’s descendants would become a numerous nation, 3) that Abraham’s descendants would take the land of Canaan to be their home, and 4) that a Savior for the whole world would come from Abraham’s descendants.

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At this time, the nation of Israel knew the fulfillment of promises number 1 and 2, in fact, they themselves were the fulfillment of those 2 promises! They were that numerous nation all descendant from that miracle child born to Abraham and his wife. Now, the Israelites were seeing that 3<sup>rd</sup> promise fulfilled too.

And what a way God started that off! He stopped up a river so that the people could walk across it on dry ground. God wanted to show his people that he keeps his promises. But God also wanted to send that message to his people for the generations to come. So he had Joshua set up a monument with 12 stones from that dry river bed.

Generations later, Israelite children would ask their parents about those stones, and parents could teach their kids about their God who always keeps his promises. They could tell their kids about the 4 promises God made to Abraham and how God had already kept 3 of those promises. They could then tell their kids about that 4<sup>th</sup> promise, that a Savior for the entire world would be born among the Israelites. God would fulfill that promise just as he fulfilled the other 3. The writer of the book of Joshua tells us that those stones were still there as he wrote. They were still there to remind God's people that he always fulfills his promises.

This lesson shows us the history God's Church has. You and I aren't the first believers and, and unless Christ comes first, you and I won't be the last. God has kept every one of his promises to his people throughout human history and that is a lesson to us: that he will keep every one of his promises to us as well!

You and I live in a world where keeping our word isn't really a priority for people. Most of us have done it. We say, "Yeah, I'll be there!" But then something comes up or we just forget and we just don't go where we say we'll be. Or just look at the state of marriages in our country. Marriage is a promise of commitment, but how many people just don't keep that promise to each other. We live in a culture where you almost have to expect people not to do what they say they will.

But never expect that from God. He always keeps his promises. Throughout the Bible, we get to see our God making promises to his people, and keeping those promises. As we see God keep promise after promise, he assures us that he will keep his promises to us as well.

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God has promised that he will forgive us and remember our sins no more, and in Christ he did just that. The Bible tells us about people like King David, who slept with another man's wife and had the husband killed in order to cover it up. But when David acknowledged his sin, God forgave him and, in spite of seriousness of David's horrible sin, the rest of the Bible remembers David as a man after God's own heart. God kept his promise to forgive David, and he will keep his promise to you too.

God has promised that he works all things for our eternal good, and he will. In Genesis, we read about Joseph who was sold into slavery by his own brothers, thrown into prison for doing the right thing, and then left forgotten in that prison for years in spite of his godly life. But then, God made him 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of one of the most powerful nations on earth at that time, and enabled Joseph to save the lives of countless numbers of people. And none of that would have happened if Joseph wasn't sold as a slave or thrown in prison. God kept his promise to work all the evil things in Joseph's life for good, and God will keep his promise to you too.

God has promised us that his Church, the gathering of all believers, will never fail, and it won't! Throughout the Old Testament, we see God's people, the Israelites, attacked by foreign nations and by temptations to open idolatry, yet the nation of Israel held together right up until the birth of our Savior Jesus. In the New Testament, we see the church attacked by persecutions from governments and from other powerful and well-established religious traditions, yet God's people only spread the news about Jesus to more and farther places.

Throughout the history of the world, we see the Church under attack from warring nations, and yet the Church is never conquered. We see the Church racked with divisions as false teachings creep into the Church, even to the point that pastors and bishops, priests and popes openly deny the gospel message, and yet believers remain strong as they stay in God's Word. We see the Church laughed at, ridiculed, and dismissed by more and more ungodly cultures, and yet the Church still stands.

Today, you and I can look at militant Islam, or at our increasingly secular culture, we can see the lifestyles of generations growing farther and farther from God's ways. The news tells us about rumors of wars and all kinds of disasters. But God has promised that his Church will never fail. What can all those things do

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against God's almighty promise?

Instead of fear, we can confidently look forward to the future of the Church, even as we face the financial, natural, national or any other kind of disasters that come from living in a sinful, broken world. Unless Christ comes first, the generations after us will need to hear the gospel promises of God! And we can share those promises, with our kids and grandkids, with our friends and relatives.

Throughout the Scriptures and throughout history, God has given us Memorials to his Fulfilled Promises. In 1 Peter 2:5, God calls us living stones. Our lives can also be Memorials to God's Fulfilled Promises. Israelite children saw those stones standing by the Jordan River and asked, "What do those mean?" In the same way, our lives, lived as forgiven sinners instead of self-righteous hypocrites; our lives, lived in expectation of our home in heaven, instead of only for this world; our lives will lead other people to ask us, "Why do you live like that?" and "Why is God so important to you?"

My fellow stones of the Church, remember those who have gone before you. They are the stones you've been built on. Always remember that Christ is your foundation, but also remember the other stones that have been built upon that, your fellow believers who have passed the gospel on to you.

And plan to pass the gospel on yourself. Plan for those who will come after you. They are the stones who will be built on you. Consider how your life will impact and influence those who follow. Consider how you can make your life a Memorial to God's Fulfilled Promises.

Finally, live with the confidence that the Church will stand forever, because God always keeps his promises. Amen.