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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Joshua 4:1 - 5:15
Title of Sermon: The Future is in the Past
Series: Courageous Living in a Dangerous World

4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, **2** "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, **3** and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." **4** So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, **5** 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, **6** to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' **7** 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."

8 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. **9** Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been^[a] 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. **10** 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, **11** 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. **12** The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, ready for battle, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. **13** About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war.

14 That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses. **15** Then the LORD said to Joshua, **16** "Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan." **17** So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." **18** 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. **19** 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. **20** And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. **21** He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' **22** tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' **23** For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. **24** 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."

One of the things that happens in life is, there are some things that are just so among us that we don't need to think about it. Like -- I'm sure most of you right now are not thinking about breathing. You just breathe the air. You presume that it's there. Probably nobody is right now feeling any fear that you're going to start levitating because gravity's going to cease. Those things just happen. They're there. You don't think about it.

Another one is memory. You're going to leave here and you're going to not ask someone that you don't know, because you don't have any memory, "Where's home?" And even before that, you're not going to ask, "Where's my car?" But because your memory is gone, you're not even going to know you own a car. During the service, no one is probably going to reach over -- like husband, wife, whatever -- boyfriend, girlfriend -- and just squeeze your hand, and you're gonna pull it back and say, "You pervert! Who are you?" That won't happen. Why? Because your memory works. Have you ever thought about that? There's nothing that you do -- right now -- other than breathing -- that works without your memory. Your marriage? Gone. Your children? You don't know you have them -- praise God. I mean, there's -- you can't have a relationship. You can't have a job. You have no idea what to do with a red light! Apart from memory, life doesn't work. Nothing works if our memory goes. We breathe. We can take in nourishment, but we can't have any relationship.

Memory's a huge gift. It is. There are things that, even just beyond things that we remember, like places and stuff, but some songs do that for me. "Run to the Father" -- I remember the first time I heard it I was on an airplane traveling back from a location. It was kind of a discouraging season, and I listened to that song, and I just felt like God had it for me. And every time we sing it, I'm sitting over there and I'm thinking back to the 37,000-foot level of a day when that song felt like it breathed life into me.

Sometimes it's even smells. Certain smells trigger memories. I know they do for my wife. When we get out on Highway 22 and we're heading west -- we don't go very far, and Kerri wants to just pause and pull over. Most people plug their nose at about Café 22 and try to hold their breath until Dallas. Not my wife -- she's like, "Pull over, honey -- ahhh." See, the dairy farm reminds her of home. It does! And it makes her feel warm and just all nostalgic and happy. There were times -- no exaggeration -- in Colorado, we had -- east of us was the city of Greeley, and there was a huge, huge cattle ranch, and, you know, they had all kinds of cows. And periodically, when the wind would be just right, she would go outside and sit on the back deck or out front and just kind of take it in. I'd say, "What're you doing?" She'd go, "Oh, don't you smell that manure?" People don't do that! Unless it creates a fond memory. It reminded her of home. She loved her home. That's the power of memory. But sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes we forget things. That's why, when I went to the store on Friday, Kerri gave me a list -- because I had to go to multiple locations and the likelihood that I was going to hit all six locations if she didn't write me a list was zero. I probably would have come home -- maybe hit three out of the six and thought, "Ha! Knocked it out, honey!" And she would've said, "Did you--" "Oh, no, I forgot that one." "Did you --" "Oh, no." So she writes me a list. And therefore, she's happy, I'm happy, and it's a good day.

Memory. If you ever watch an NFL game, you're going to see every one of the referees, or the umpires there, and they're gonna switch in-between downs, and they're just gonna move this little rubber band. It's a black one. You can see it on

their hand. And every time there's another down, they move it. Why? Well, because it's embarrassing to have ten million people watch you and you forget -- it's fourth down, they should be punting, and you say it's third down, have at it! If you remember Colorado football in the NCAA, a number of years ago they forgot which down it was, they gave them an extra one, Colorado won, and they won the national championship! Those referees have been in psychiatric care ever since! Why? Because they forgot what down it was.

Memory's a beautiful thing. But -- it can fail us. And that's why God tells Joshua when he comes through the Jordan, and it is a celebration. It's Joshua's first real leadership task. And they come through the Jordan, and they're on to the other side, and everyone is going, "Man, let's have a party!" And then there's the soldiers going, "Hey, let's get ready. We need to fight. We've got fortified cities ahead of us." And what does God do? "Joshua, build me an altar." "You want me to put up a bunch of rocks?" "Yes." "Why? Because those memorials that you're going to build will become like triggers, bringing the past into the present. And I want you to do that time and time and time again."

"These stones," it tells us in verse 7 -- "These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever." What does a memorial do? It reminds them of what God has done. It stirs in their mind the day that they came through, and the Jordan parted, and it dammed upstream, and they all walked through. And it was like God delivered them. It reminds them of the deliverance that He gave them at the Red Sea. All of this, 40 years of wandering, but ultimately, God got us home. That's what happens at that altar. That's what memorials do -- they remind us of things that took place in the past. And God understands that you're human -- got a great memory; it's a phenomenal gift -- but here's the reality: If I hadn't had my list on Friday, I would've forgotten part of it. And God thinks the same for you. He understands that if you aren't reminded through the bread and the cup periodically of the death of Christ, it is quite probable that you're going to go week after week after week and never remember.

If you come into my office, you're going to see a number of memorials. You're going to see a set of commentaries -- they're old commentaries, they're old Matthew Henry commentaries. I've never read them -- don't plan on it. If I need a Matthew Henry commentary, I'm going to get it online. I have it online on my Logos site. So, you ask, "Well, why do you have that?" It's because of who gave it to me. The man that in many ways called me into ministry -- my pastor that I grew up under, the one that played racquetball with me every week, the one that started to take me on his evangelistic crusades where he was preaching and say, "How about you sing, and then I'll preach." And we would drive all over the northwest, and he would talk to me about serving and pastoring, and -- he's the first one who looked me in the eye and said, "I think God has a calling on your life." I don't have those commentaries because I want to read them -- I don't even have them because they're old. They are. Printed in the early 1900s. I have them because they remind

me of a calling that God placed on my life and that was voiced through a pastor of mine.

If you go in my office, you're going to see a number of crosses. In particular, there's one in the corner. It's got a big rock on the base of it, and the cross is in the middle. I was doing a series on the cross, and a friend of mine was listening every week, and he would go home, and he would craft something together. And he'd put it all together, and if you were to come in and sit in my office, you would probably notice somewhere around 15 to 20 different nuances of that cross. Why? Because he studied the cross with me all the way through. And every time I look at it, I think of Christ, and I think of the things that He taught me that I taught him. And I think of my friend. It triggers something in the past. It reminds me of something that God has done.

If you come into my office, you will see a carving of Africa. I bought it on a particular day. I remember the day -- it was the day that I was invited to go over -- I had a student in Denver, his name was Roger and he was a dear, dear friend. He was one of those students who became a lifetime friend. That often happens. And Roger invited our church to participate with this church plant, and we did, and then I went over for the anniversary. It was the one-year anniversary. And I was there, and the tent that we had bought was there, and we were getting ready for the worship service, and I looked around, and I was like, "Good night -- there's no one out here. In fact, there's no one who even lives out here. We're out in middle of sand!" And all of a sudden, it's just like these people emerged out of the sand. It's like they grew out of the sand. And well over 400 people came. And I'll never forget -- the worship started, and there was a 16-year-old little boy who was up there on the drums, and he was playing, and they started in Portuguese. That was good, and they were singing, they were vibrant. But then something transformed this place. And they quit singing in Portuguese and they started singing in Shangana. Their native tongue. And they began to dance, and the whole place danced. Not me -- I just watched. If I dance, no one worships.

I went and bought something. Because I didn't want to forget that day. I didn't want to forget the day where we celebrated together the work of God to plant this church. That's why God said to Joshua, "Put up 12 stones. And the reason is not just for you, but the reason is for your children who are going to come after you. Because those stones are going to present an opportunity to pass along your faith. And Joshua, that's what you need to do. Because I'm not gonna part the Jordan every day. I'm not gonna part the Red Sea every day." And He tells them in verse 6, He says: "You build this altar, this memorial, as a sign among you, and in the future, and when your children ask you -- and they will -- 'Dad, what do these stones mean? Mom -- can I take one of these stones home? You're doing some landscape work at home. It's a perfect size!' 'Oh, no honey, don't ever do that.' 'What do these mean? Why are they here?' Tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and when it crossed the

Jordan -- the Ark -- the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones will forever remind you of this day."

What's the principle? Live your life in such a way that it provokes questions in your children's heart, because those questions are far more important than your lectures. They're stories of God's work in your life. And because they are stories of God's work in your life, your children are compelled by it, your grandchildren are compelled by it. And in fact, I want to argue that if you don't have stories, don't teach. Because you'll inoculate your kids to God. It was the stories -- "Dad, what are those stones about?" "Oh -- let me tell you. We were standing here, and the Jordan was almost a mile wide, and we thought for certain we were gonna die. And God parted it. It was the most miraculous thing I've ever seen! God dammed up the river, and it quit flowing, and we walked across unscathed, unharmed! It was a miracle!" "You witnessed that, Dad?" "Yes. I walked through the river."

They present opportunities. They do. It allows you to tell your children about how God was alive in your life. And these memorials that God tells us to build, these altars that God tells us to build -- they're not altars that we sacrifice. Nobody brought a lamb down here this morning. But they are reminders, and any one of us who has raised children in the church, we had that moment -- I know you did -- where your kid said, "Mom, what is that bread and that cup all about?" And maybe, like my kids, "Hey, I'm kinda hungry. Can I grab one of those?" And it gives us the opportunity to teach them. "Let me tell you about a moment that God worked in our life." I plead with you -- live your life in such a way that it stirs questions in your children's heart, because when they ask, it's in that moment that their hearts are open to learn.

I am afraid that there are a fair number of families that have regular family devotions, and they lecture to their children and they teach their children, but they have no stories of faith. They have no moments where God has showed up. They don't have any moments where they've trusted God for something supernatural and powerful. They don't have any altars in their home. All they have is a 30-minute time for dad to lecture. I'm not against -- Deuteronomy 6 is really clear: "Teach your children, when you rise up in the morning." But what is all the way through the Scriptures is when God shows up -- "Build an altar." Why? Because it is the single most powerful moment for you to teach your grandchildren. When they come over to your home. Maybe when they spend the night. "Grampa, why do you get up at 5:00 o'clock in the morning? Don't you know nights are for sleep?" "Grandma, why do you put that apron over your head and tell us don't bother you? What's that all about? I thought grammas were always supposed to be available to their grandkids." "Not when I'm praying." Live your life in such a way that it stirs questions in your children's heart. Why? Because memorials do that. They act like triggers, and they bring the past into the present. And they're also opportunities for expressions of worship to our God.

Verse 9 tell us that Joshua set up the 12 stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priest who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood. And they're there to this day. If you read verse 9, and you read the rest of the text, you kind of wonder. "Wait a minute, are there actually two places?" And I wonder if there weren't. There's the one that Joshua built, a memorial to God. Why did Joshua build it? I think it's because this is where Joshua kind of said, "You know what?" This is the first moment where God said, "Joshua, you're the man. I'm gonna validate you in front of the people. I'm gonna let them know that you have my favor, just like Moses did." And Joshua -- remember, like, have you ever seen an NFL player, like a running back or a wide receiver? When they get into the end zone for the very first time, you know what they do? They get the ball. They don't throw it up. They don't go, "Hey man, let's celebrate!" They take that ball, and they enshrine it. If somebody hits a home run and it's a significant one, they pay all kinds of money to get that ball back. Why? Because it's a memory. And for Joshua, he built a memorial to God because that was a point where God said, "Joshua, I'm gonna validate you." And He did. And Joshua didn't want to forget it.

Sometimes -- maybe like this one -- it becomes a hidden altar that marks a pivotal point in our walk with God. It's that moment where it's something that God did, and it stirs in us, and we don't want to ever want to forget it. I was traveling with a friend one time. We were overseas, and -- he was facing just a massive leadership challenge. And it was huge. And it was perplexing. And we prayed, and I was over in his hotel room, and we were praying. And God did something that was just miraculous. God solved something that looked like it had no good ending. He called my room, and he goes, "Hey, I'm going shopping. You wanna go with me?" "No, not really. The only shopping I like to do is Home Depot and the grocery store." He goes, "I'm gonna go shop for a rug." I'm like -- "Whew! Count me out." "No, I want you to go with me. Because you were a part of God's work."

We went, and he bought a rug. Paid a ton of money for it. Paid probably double that to ship it. If you were to go into his office today, that rug is there. No one walks on it -- that's not the purpose. But if you go into my friend's office, and if you pray with him, you're gonna be kneeling on the rug. And I dare say well over a hundred times, somebody has asked, "Why are we kneeling on this rug?" And he will tell them the story. "I want to take you back to a time when God did the impossible." And then they pray. And there's nothing better than being reminded that all things are possible with God just before you pray. They become these hidden altars, and they mark this pivotal point in your walk with God, and that's why God said to Joshua: "Joshua, I want you build these stones. And when your kids walk by, and when your grandkids walk by, and Joshua -- when you walk by, you're gonna be reminded that your God validates you. You're gonna be reminded that your God has nothing that can block Him from fulfilling His purposes."

My friend, you need memorials in your life. You do. Why? Because they're reminders of the past that strengthen our faith for the future. God knows we need them -- that's why He gave them to us. The church has two of them. The first one is

baptism. When a person is baptized up there -- or anywhere -- what is it? It's a picture of the gospel. And there will be people, sometimes hopefully invited to these baptisms -- it's like, "Man, why do you dunk people down into the water? That's kind of weird. I mean, are you trying to drown your church? That's not a good way for church growth. What do you do that for?" And then you have the opportunity. "Well, it's a picture. It's a picture of a person's death, and it's a picture of their resurrection. And it's exactly a picture of what happened for us over 2,000 years ago when Christ died. That whole thing is about a story that God tells. That He loved us so much that He sent His Son to die, to be buried, to resurrect, so that we might have life." Every time somebody is baptized, we're taken back to our own personal baptism and we're reminded that we were dead and Christ then made us alive.

We have communion. That communion is an opportunity to be reminded of a death that occurred so that a victory can occur. It reminds us that God has the power to overcome death. He has the power to forgive all sins. He has the power to take your addiction and your struggle that manifested itself yesterday -- or maybe even this morning -- and allow you to walk up and lay it in front of the cross and have Jesus put His arm around you and say, "I love you." There's a reason why we do this -- yes, it's because Christ commanded us. But it's because I forget. I don't bring a lamb to the worship service. I don't have a priest in front of me slaughter the lamb and make a mess out of the whole place, and I don't have blood that touches me, and I don't have to clean up the place, and I never have a priest look me in the eye and say, "Your sins are forgiven. You can go home." So, I need to have a reminder. I need to be reminded that God has power. That He can be victorious over death.

I'm reading right now just in my free time, with another brother in the church, through the book of Revelation, and we're in about I think chapter 19, and man -- it gets way -- if you've ever read through the book of Revelation, about 17, 18 -- it gets really, really scary. I mean, it's crazy the stuff that happens. The whole ocean is turned into blood and the rivers are all that happens. But I love the one passage where it's talking about the city of Babylon, this representation of sin. This powerful woman, this city, that permeates the entire world with her sin. And as you're reading down through this text, there's a line, and it says -- and I'll paraphrase it: "And in one hour, God destroys Babylon." He doesn't want you to forget it, so He says it again in the same text: "And in one hour, God destroys Babylon."

Oh, I began to fabricate in my mind all the things that could happen -- a big, huge earthquake, maybe it's a nuclear bomb, or maybe it's just God blows on the city. And in one hour -- that's the point of the text. This powerful city that has destroyed and poisoned the world with her adultery is taken out by God in one hour. Can you imagine -- if San Francisco was eliminated in one hour? If LA was eliminated in one hour. If Istanbul and its 17 million people were eliminated in one hour. You see, this communion -- it reminds me: That's the God you and I pray to. That's the God we worship. And so, anything that we're going to face, any challenge that's going to

come our way -- God says, "I need you to be reminded of just how powerful I am." Why? Because those memorials strengthen us for our journey of faith. They do, they empower us. They strengthen us. They give us boldness to believe that God can do something great. He did this, he says at the end of chapter 4, "He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful so that you might always fear the Lord your God."

Now, we know that one of the memorials -- maybe if there were two; if not, the memorial, the 12 stones, were placed at Gilgal. And why is that important? Number one, it's because Gilgal was going to be, if you will, the center, the operational center for Joshua. Everything that he does in terms of moving into the promised land happens right there in Gilgal. And so, periodically, as he comes from home to the office, what does he walk by? The altar. When he faces the difficulty at Ai what does he walk by? The altar. But it's not just there. Israel's first king was crowned at Gilgal. David welcomed back into the nation of Israel after Absalom's rebellion happened at Gilgal. The school of the prophets where Elijah taught, where Elisha was taught and taught. I wonder, on the day when Elisha came to God, when God said to Elisha, "I want you to follow Elijah" -- I wonder if by chance that might have been a day that Elisha walked past an altar, and when God said to him, "You're gonna take Elijah's place," and he looked at the stones, and he remembered, "That's the God that I serve! He parted the Jordan, and He parted the Red Sea, and He brought down fire on the prophets" -- all of a sudden Elisha looks up to God and he says, "I'll do it if you give me a double portion. I'll do it if you expand my prophetic capacity -- not for my glory, but for yours."

Where do you get that kind of faith? What stirs in your heart? They built this altar so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful. Can I ask you a question? When you walk through your house, is there anything that tells your grandkids God's powerful? When you walk through your office -- I know they say that you can't evangelize, and that's understandable. You're on company time -- when you're on company time, work. Is there anything in your office that stirs questions in people's heart so that when you go to lunch -- "Why do you have that? Why do you have a rug that you don't let anyone walk on? Why do you do that?" Is there anything in your life that is a testimony to the glory and the power of God that stirs a person's faith, that causes your grandkid to say, "Grampa, when you die, I'm never gonna forget the story of God. Never." Or might it be that when you tell stories to your grandkids, you're the hero? And they worship you. But when you're dead, all they have is your memory.

See, God says live your life in such a way that it stirs questions in your children's heart. Questions that remind them of the past so that their faith's strong for the future. See, what my children and grandchildren need is not stories of my heroism. They need stories of how God showed up in Kerri's and my life and did the miraculous, because that's the God that they're gonna trust, and that's the God that they're gonna walk with. They're not gonna walk with me. I'm gonna be dead. They need a living God. "Joshua, that's why you built an altar, is because

when your kids walk by, when Elisha walks by, when Elijah walks by, when David walks by, I want them to be reminded of a time I parted the Jordan."

Professor Daniel Taylor, who's kind of an expert in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noted that Bonhoeffer was a reader of particular kinds of books. One of them was entitled, *Heroes of Everyday*. Bonhoeffer, who was martyred for his faith, for standing up against the Nazi regime, read this book over and over again. *Heroes of Everyday*. What was it? It was stories of courageous young people, who with selflessness and clear thinking often saved the lives of others. It is confirmed by a number of people that just prior to Bonhoeffer's execution he was reading a book called Plutarch's *Lives*. It's a book that explores the courageous character of ancient figures. Taylor goes on to make this observation, and I really appreciate this: "Can we doubt that Bonhoeffer's reading shaped his acting, including the decision to risk his own life to save others? Ethics are often more formed from the stories of which we surround ourselves than just by the rules that are drilled into us."

I'm not against family devotions. I think they're marvelous. But if you have family devotions, you better have God stories. Because if you don't, you'll inoculate your kids to God. It will be a dead faith, of which they've never had any evidence that God shows up on earth. Somewhere in your home, somewhere in your life, in your office, in your automobile, you need a memorial. Hopefully multiple ones. "Grampa, why do you have books on your shelf that you never read? Grampa, why do you have that cross and often I find you kneeling and praying in front of it?" Reminders of the past strengthen our faith for the future. And those reminders are stories. They're stories of God's heroism. And what they do is, they strengthen your faith. But they also allow you to strengthen the faith of others. And when you're dead, they have a living God whom they're convinced acts on this earth.

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