

Email Subject: Monuments Speak!
Sender: Joshua - wallcrumbler@bible.net
Joshua 4:1-9 (Pentecost 14)

Dear Christian,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior! My name is Joshua. I had witnessed the ten plagues God sent in Egypt with the intent of motivating Pharaoh to let us go. I saw God part the waters of the Red Sea. Forty years had passed since we were freed from slavery and we were finally entering the Promised Land under my leadership. You may not know much about me, but you probably know what I am most known for. When we marched around the city of Jericho, it was done with the directions I received from God. Do you remember that wondrous event? We really did nothing to crumble those walls except shout at the top of our lungs, but God crumbled the walls of that mighty city and I led the charge to defeat it. That's another story for another day. Maybe someday we can talk about it, but before we could get to Jericho, we had to cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land.

The Jordan River may not be the Nile or the Mississippi, but crossing the Jordan presented a challenge. It was the time of the year when the water was higher and its banks were overflowing. God had already done so many amazing things. Yet he was going to do another amazing thing. We were instructed to follow the Ark of the Covenant. When the priests carrying the ark stepped into the river, the waters from the north were cut off. As the waters piled up and the priests stood in the middle of the now dry river bed, we began crossing into the Promised Land. It was like God put his hand in the river stopping the water from flowing like it usually does so that we could walk across safely. When all of us had crossed God commanded me to have twelve men, one representing each tribe of Israel, pick up a stone from where the priests were standing. They were to set up these stones up on the other side of the river as a monument and memorial to what God had just done.

When you look at a monument it seems to speak to you even though it isn't alive. Whether people listen or not, monuments speak! As long as you know what it is and the real reason why it is there, monuments speak to you. They teach about the past. Whether good or bad, it is good to know the past as it helps you understand the present and influence the future. Just think of some famous monuments in this country and what they are meant to teach you. The Statue of Liberty teaches you about the principle of freedom on which this country was founded. The Gateway Arch commemorates the westward expansion of the country with St. Louis being the launching point for that expansion. The 9-11 memorial at Ground Zero helps you to remember what happened in this country on that day. Monuments like the Vietnam Wall and Tomb of the Unknown Soldier tell you about those who made the ultimate sacrifice serving this country. Each of those monuments speak in some way to those who would listen.

So what would this particular monument say to us and the generations that followed? It would serve as a teaching tool to learn and remember. It proclaimed the story of how God brought us safely into the land that he promised to give us as a new home. It would be a permanent memorial proclaiming what God in his grace had done for us, his people, so that we would remember it. I told the men who I chose to gather those stones this:

“Go to the middle of the Jordan in front of the Ark of the Lord your God. There each man is to lift up one stone on his shoulder. The number will correspond to the number of the tribes descended from the sons of Israel, so that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in the future, ‘What do these stones mean for you?’ Then you shall respond to them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the Ark

of the Covenant of the Lord. When the ark passed through the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones will serve as a permanent memorial for the people of Israel.” (vs. 5-7)

My friends, a monument teaching and proclaiming God’s grace is still standing, but it isn’t a monument made up of stones. It is a monument made up of people - his Church. His Church is more than just this congregation. It is all believers of all time throughout the whole world. Look at the grace God has shown to his Church through an even greater promise, the promise of a Savior, a promise kept through Jesus. The mighty hand of Jesus has held back your sins like God held back the water of the Jordan. You pass through this life knowing those sins cannot harm you and that on the other side is the promised land of heaven. God’s Church stands as a monument to his grace through Jesus. Every one of you is like a stone in that monument.

Just as that monument at the Jordan would teach and proclaim what God had done for us, God’s Church, anchored in the truth of Jesus, continues to stand as a monument that speaks even today doing the same. The monument we built out of stones could be found near the Jordan River, but where is the Church found? It is found in your homes where families gather around God’s Word. It is found in individual churches like this one where God’s people gather for worship around that Word, where his sacraments are administered, and where the Scriptures are studied together as has been done here for nearly 150 years. It is found in schools that provide a Christ-centered education as this church has done for 40 years. Really it is found wherever God’s people are found confessing Christ Jesus to each other and the world around them. The Church stands as a monument to God’s grace that teaches and proclaims the truth of what he has done for his Church, for you - his people. But how long will that monument continue to stand?

When God commanded us to set those stones from the Jordan River up as a monument, it was to serve as a permanent memorial to the great things God had done for us in bringing us to the Promised Land. When I last saw them, those stones were still there. However, that was centuries ago. I’m fairly certain they aren’t there anymore. Even if they are, do people still remember why they are there or what they are saying? Probably not.

Monuments can be destroyed. They can erode away. If that happens they no longer speak anything to the world. With each passing day it appears that the monument of God’s Church is being destroyed by the sledge hammers of constant ridicule and opposition to the truth of Christ and his Word. The pushing of persecution seems to be toppling it so that it can’t speak anymore. It appears that the Church is losing its speaking influence on the world. As a result individual churches and church bodies do all they can to remain standing and speaking. They change the truth moving away from what it should be standing. What results appears to be the monument eroding itself into non-existence. How can the monument of God’s Church continue to stand?

My friends, church buildings may crumble. Congregations may close their doors. Individual Christians may be persecuted for their faith. The world may do all it can to silence and rid God’s Church from the face of this earth. Dear Christian, take heart. God has promised that the monument of his Church will continue to stand forever. I recall what Peter, my fellow saint in glory, heard Jesus say to him after he had made a bold confession of faith declaring Jesus to be the Christ. Jesus said, **“And I tell you, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.” (Matthew 16:18)**

On what does God’s true Church stand? What is the foundational stone? Does it stand on the pebbles of people who serve it? No, it stands on the solid rock of the truth that Peter declared. The monument is built upon the solid rock of Christ and his Word which does not change. Because it stands on that rock, the Church will stand forever. Just as God preserved us causing us to walk through the Jordan River on dry land, so he

also preserves his new Israel, his Church in the world so that it will continue to be a monument speaking of his grace forever until all of his Church has been gathered in the Promised Land of glory. Your friend, Joshua