

May 25, 2014  
Memorial Day  
*Thanks for the Memories*  
Joshua 4:1-9

**Joshua 4:1-9** <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 are standing, and 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.

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His name was John Logan. His name is not considered one of the great names in history. However, he was the national commander of the Grand Army of the Union in the 1860s. It was Logan who declared May 30, 1868 a “Memorial Day.” People gathered at Arlington National Cemetery to put flowers on the graves of both the Union and Confederate soldiers. It was not an original idea. Communities who had lost men in the Civil War had been decorating the grave of their lost soldiers for several years. New York became the first state to make Memorial Day a holiday in 1873. By 1890, all northern states observed Memorial Day. However, southern states had separate Memorial Days until the close of the First World War. Since 1971, Memorial Day has been observed on the last Monday of May, ensuring a three day holiday weekend. How do you remember those who have died in service to our country?

Telling you the history of Memorial Day is my way of reminding you that Memorial Day is more than a weekend that signals the beginning of summer. It is a weekend to remember. We remember all those individuals that died in service to our country. Do you know of anyone whose life was cut short to help keep America free? It is also a weekend to remember lost loved ones, both family and friends. Tomorrow morning I am scheduled to be in the national cemetery in Rittman, Ohio. I am almost looking forward to going, because it is important to remember.

It is especially important to remember those who have died for a greater cause. The ability to remember is one of those things that separates us from mere animals. At the very heart of this weekend's scripture lesson is the importance of remembering. Let us look at the scripture lesson together.

We are in the fourth chapter of Joshua. After forty years in the wilderness, the people have just crossed the Jordan and entered into the Promised Land. The first thing they do in their new home is to build a memorial. God instructs Joshua to tell the people to take twelve stones, one representing each tribe, from the middle of the Jordan (verse 2). The tribes do so, and God stops the water from flowing to make their task easier (verse 7). (It is easy to stop a river after you have divided a sea.) The stones are taken to dry ground and piled up. That pile of stone is to act as reminder to future generations (verses 6-7). There is nothing unique about this memorial. It is just a pile of rocks, but it serves the purpose. It did what all memorials do. What do all memorials do? They do two things. First, they make us remember the past. Second, they remind us of what is really important. It is those two things I want to look at today. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **The Past**

As future generations looked at that pile of rocks they remembered the past. I don't just mean the day they crossed the Jordan. That day was just one page in the long history of the Hebrew people. They remembered everything that happened to their people to that point. How well do you remember your Old Testament? They remembered the four patriarchs. They remembered Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. They remembered how Joseph saved the people from the famine and led them into Egypt. They remembered how their favored status was evoked, and slavery became a reality. They remembered how hard their lives were as slaves, and their prayers for a liberator. They remembered the day they left Egypt and the parting of the sea. They remembered the day Moses came down from Sinai with the Ten Commandments, and their wilderness experience. They remembered Joshua, and the generation that seized their land. Memorials are designed to help us remember and help us see how much life has changed.

On the Marblehead Peninsula in northwest Ohio is Johnson Island. It is not one of those places that tourist information promotes. Generally speaking, it is undeveloped. It is a great place for camping and fishing. In the 1860s, it was a great place to put a prisoner of war camp during the Civil War. It is near Lakeside, so I have been there many times. I have read the historical marker and examined the memorial countless times. The story is interesting. When the Civil War began, many believed it would end in a matter of days. They were wrong. The war lasted for years. A problem soon developed for the Union. What was the Union army to do with Confederate prisoners of war? They wanted to relocate them to an isolated spot. That isolated place was Johnson Island. A POW camp was hastily established. Life in that camp was hard. The plywood buildings were hot in the summer and frigid in the winter.

Only one person ever escaped from the camp. He was returned when they found him floating on a log near Sandusky. I hate to say it, but it is true - death was common.

The only thing that remains today is a small cemetery. I have read the names of those departed soldiers countless times. Their home states are mentioned on their headstones. Most came from the Deep South. It bothers me that they never returned home. However, the thing that captures my imagination about Johnson Island is the location. If you take that short walk to the shores of Lake Erie, you can see all the rides of Cedar Point. If you turn one way, you see the graves. If you turn around, you can see the amusement park across the water. The contrast is shocking! That location reminds me that our world has changed over the past 150 years.

How much has the world changed in the last 150 years? When the Civil War was fought, America was an agricultural nation. My family was no exception. However, my family hasn't owned a farm in four generations. When the Civil War was being fought, illiteracy was high. Try to be successful today without a high school diploma. When the Civil War was being fought, horses were the main mode of transportation. Did anyone ride a horse to church today? During the Civil War, communication was dominated by the hand-written letter. Did everyone here remember to turn their cell phone off? Has anyone here received a text in the last five minutes? Do I have to go on? The world has reinvented itself in the past 150 years. Would anyone here like to have surgery using 1860s procedures and medicines? One of the things we do on Memorial Day is remember the past! However, we also remember what is important.

### **The Important**

Joshua's stone memorial did more than just remind them of historical events. It reminded them of the general theme of their race. It reminded them that God had always been with them and God always would be. They had a special relationship with God. After all, they are God's Chosen People. That was really important to them. What is really important to you?

You may not know this, but I turned 57 on my birthday. Sarah, Vic and Anna bought me a membership to [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com). I have to admit, I think I am addicted. I have been staying up late researching my family. It really is fascinating. I have gotten out old family photographs and have attached some information with the names. My favorite family picture sits on my dresser. The picture is an old photograph. It is faded, but I can still make out the images. I pick it up every day and look at it. My Aunt Phyllis tells me it is a photograph of an Adams family reunion. The year must be about the year 1900. The picture is not unique. You may have one of your own family. Everyone is sitting in front of a farm house. All the men have beards; all the women are wearing long dresses. The oldest are sitting on chairs in the middle. The youngest are sitting on the ground. There is a young boy sitting in front of the oldest man. That young boy is my grandfather, Roger Adams. He was the only one in that picture that I ever met. Everyone else in that picture has been gone for years.

However, I look at that old faded photograph every day because they are family. The blood that was flowing in their veins is still flowing through my veins. Those strangers are my family.

I like to think that the core values of the generation in that picture are my core values. Let me just speak the truth. Not a single person in that old photograph is extremely handsome or rich. Not a single Adams ever invented something that changed the world or wrote a book that made a single individual think. I came from a long line of hard working farmers. However, that does not mean being an Adams is not important. Being an Adams means certain things. First, it means you are a good person. In other words, your word means something. Second, it means you are honest. Third, it means you are loyal. Loyal to your spouse, children, friends and country. Fourth, it means you are a Christian. Adams' have always been strong churchmen and believers. We understand Jesus is our only hope of salvation. We always have and I pray we always will. That is what is important to us. What is really important to you?

Recently, I was talking to Bill Johnson. (No not the cow in the hallway, or the politician). I was talking to my good friend Bill Johnson, the preacher. He is living life in the "fast lane" in Sugarcreek, Ohio among the Amish. He was telling me about his church and the void that has recently been created. His most active lay person is leaving Bill's church to serve as pastor of a small United Methodist congregation in that area. Bill says they are lucky to have him because he is such a wonderful Christian man. The church he is inheriting is in distress. The present pastor is offering little leadership, so nothing is happening. They haven't had Communion in several years. They requested the first thing they do when their new pastor arrives, is to have Communion. Why is Communion so important to that small membership church? Why is Communion so important to you? Communion is a memorial. Like all memorials, during Communion we do two things. First, we remember the past. We remember what Jesus did. Second, we remember what is important. We are disciples. We are striving to become a little more like Jesus every day, and we are to make other disciples, who are striving to be like Jesus. Don't tell me memorials aren't important!

The other day, May 21, 2014, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum opened in New York City. It was constructed at Ground Zero, the same location the World Trade Towers once stood. Like with most things in our land, it was welcomed with mixed reviews. It is impossible to make everyone happy, especially something so emotional. That day is painful to remember. Everyone knows where they were on that day. Can I be honest with you? I am not sure I want to visit it at this point, because it is so emotional. However, I am glad they built the memorial for two reasons. First, it reminds us of the past. We should never forget the people that perished on that horrible day. Second, it reminds us of what is really important. The innocence of America is gone. We can't be foolish enough to think that we can live in isolation. We live in a complex world community, and we have the right to protect ourselves. Don't tell me memorials aren't important!

This is Memorial Day weekend! If you want to keep the spirit of the holiday, then you don't celebrate Memorial Day, you observe it. It is not a time to party! It is a time to remember. It is a time to remember the past. History has so much to teach us. It is a time to remember what is important. What is important to you? French writer Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863) once said, *"Of what use is the memory of facts, if not to serve as an example of good or of evil?"* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**