**Deddens ~ Joshua 4: 19-24**

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We would like to administer the Word of God to you about:

**THE MONUMENT OF GOD’S FAITHFULLNESS AT GILGAL.**

We see:

1) the dating of this monument according to the covenant past.

2) the explanation of the monument for the covenant present.

3) the preaching from this monument for the covenant future.

**ONE**

If we want to understand today’s text properly it is necessary first to determine the place which the book of Joshua incorporates within the whole of God’s revelation and the sacred history of the old covenant.

In its contents the book of Joshua is closely connected with the book of Deuteronomy, which precedes this book. Now Deuteronomy possesses a type of preaching character. Actually the whole book is a great oration, an ongoing farewell sermon which Moses gives to the people. It is as it were that in this book he gives his (will and) testament for the people.

Now Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses and the book of Joshua begins with recalling the same event, and then continues to relate how God commands Joshua, Moses’ successor, to bring the people over the Jordan, and take possession of Canaan, and also tells how Joshua fulfilled this commission. Then the book further distinguishes between the actual occupation of the land and its division amongst the various tribes. So first it is written how, after the crossing of the Jordan, Israel defeats the opposition of Canaan under Joshua’s direction and the wonderful assistance of the Lord Himself, and subdues the larger part of the land west of the Jordan. And the last part of the book is devoted to the division of the promised land in which each tribe is appointed a special territory by lot. At its conclusion you can read the words of Joshua’s farewell, the renewal of the relationship between God and His people, and finally the death of Joshua and Eleazer.

Being closely linked together, these contents show the significance that this bible book has in distinction from the others. This significance becomes clear due to the place this book of Joshua receives, namely the first book following the so called Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. Here the changeover is made from the books of Moses to the rest of the books of the old covenant. The book reveals how the Lord established the factual occupation of the promised land by His people. So the relationship of the book of Joshua with the previous five books is the relationship between promise and fulfillment. The main theme of the whole book is that the people inherit the land of Canaan by entering that promised land.

The emphasis repeatedly come to THIS: that the whole occupation, and all that was coupled to it, occurred in complete agreement with the decisions that the Lord had made through Moses for which Joshua had to serve as executer of Moses’ testament. And throughout all this the Lord’s covenant mercy constantly glitters in the fulfillment of His promises to the fathers.

On the other hand the book of Joshua also casts a glimpse forward. It contains a detailed designation of the borders for the different tribal territories, which would apply in following ages. Now that God had given his covenant to the people of Israel, and had confirmed it on the journey through the wilderness, this covenant must permeate the whole of Israel’s life. Israel, which could live free and holy in the inheritance foretold to the fathers. The book of Joshua shows us Israel at a highpoint, but also at a crossroad.

It states with joy that for a long time after the death of Joshua it served the Lord faithfully. But it does not hide that the heart of the people remained in essence the same, and it also prophesies of the snare which the remainder of the Canaanites will be for the people. When you read the book of Judges it shows in what tragic ways this prophecy came to fulfillment.

Therefore in the whole book of Joshua there is one proclamation that goes out: The people of God, who are so privileged by God’s wonderful deeds are mandated to keep His covenant, and to guard against rejecting that covenant. The words of the last bible book are written above this book with visible letters as it were: “Hold fast what you have so that no one can take away your crown”! And at the same time the theme of the book is not only one of warning but also joyful and encouraging. Here we see Israel as the select troop of the living God, with the Lord Himself as the great War Lord in the lead, advancing from victory to victory. It proclaims the triumph of the congregation over all her enemies by the powerful hand of God.. It is the power of the Spirit of God, by faith, by which the mountains are made low and the seas dry. On almost every page of this book rises the joyful question of victorious faith: “If God is FOR us, who will be against us?”

Look, congregation, these things are very weighty for our understanding of the text. The Lord has always made clear to His people: I am with you, and then NO ONE can be against you. I the Lord will do it. You only have to follow the instructions, the commandments. You read these promises in the first chapter of this book. And now the chapter of our text is ONE illustration of the truth of that given Word.

Now that the people stood before the borders of the promised land ready to enter the inheritance there appears to be one more difficult obstacle. There lay the mighty river Jordan which was the last stumbling block on the way to the rest. And the people had to wait three days on the Plain of the Jordan waiting for the things that were to happen. It was as it were that the Lord let the people contemplate the Jordan for so long a time in order to deeply impress them that they would never come to the other side by their own strength. It was shortly before Passover, at the beginning of the harvest and the grain was standing ripe on the flat fields of Jericho. At that time of year the Jordan was awash with the melt waters from the snows on Mt. Harmon. It says that the river had completely surged over its banks. With such high water it was completely impossible for a people with so many women folk and children to be able to cross over.

What happened then makes us think of that night by the Red Sea, when Pharaoh and all his people were drowned in the waters, while the people of Israel were led across on dry ground.

Only: by the Red Sea there was the pursuit of the Egyptian, and above the sea, in that black darkness, which shrouded Pharaoh and his cavalry, a terrible storm broke loose; the rumbling threatened to break with a tremendous crash while the lightening bolted from the heavens and the downpour converted the ground into a bog and the waves rushed in to overwhelm Israel’s enemies. Israel then received freedom from servitude, delivered by the Lord, surrounded by walls of water and covered by a cloud. But now it was a summer day, the enemy was sheltered behind their battlements: it was not a journey toward freedom but one to a rest from a life of wandering and later also from war. When the feet of the priests who carried the ark had barely touched the water it already pulled back. And according to the words of Psalm 114 this was a river which did not drain into the sea but which returned in a backwards motion and streamed toward the Salt Sea as far as 30 kilometers from the place were the ark was. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho while the priests stood in the middle of the Jordan. And all Israel crossed on dry ground - it is repeated with emphasis, and reiterated over again: until the people had completed crossing the Jordan. No one remained!

In its writing the ENTIRE fourth chapter continuously shows that it came only by a miracle of the Lord. The priests did not do it. But the LORD did it. He lived in the sign of the ark. He first promised: I will do it, I am with you. You must follow instructions, and the commandments only. And when Joshua follows the instructions exactly and to the point, then he is pulled along in the glory of the ark.

To set this fact firm for the church of all ages Joshua places a series of twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan. The following generations will have to see it whenever the Jordan is at low water: THERE in the middle of the river the ark had stopped, as a sign of His presence.

After these things you read the message of the text: On the tenth day of the first month the people came up from the banks of the Jordan; and they encamped at Gigal, on the eastern border of Jericho.

It does not seem so important at first hearing that the DATE of these occurrences was written with such emphatic words. Perhaps it was necessary for the descendents to hold on to the moment when this wonder occurred, but besides that it has further significance?

Now congregation, I will remind you of what the Lord had spoken to the people of Israel just before the moment that the last plague struck the Egyptians, and so just before the moment that Israel was led out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Then you read in the book Exodus: “this month will be the beginning of months, it will be the first month of the year. Speak as follows to the whole assembly of Israel: On the tenth of this month everyone, each family, shall take a piece of the flock, an animal of the flock per family. And all the assembly of the congregation of Israel will slaughter it at dusk: After that they will take the blood and will brush it on both door posts and the upper sill, on the houses where they are eating. And when I see the blood I will pass by.”

And if you NOW lay both of these messages, from Exodus and the book of Joshua, side by side then you will see the tremendous importance of this date. It was exactly on the tenth of the first month, the tenth of Nisan, the people had crossed the Jordan. That was the beginning of entering the promised land, the land of the inheritance.

That was EXACTLY the same date as the beginning of their departure from Egypt! The tenth Nisan, when the people picked an animal from the flock, was ALSO the day when the deliverance from Egypt began.

Here the miracle of entry was fastened to the miracle of departure. So actually the entire time between, all the forty years wandering in the wilderness, was entirely thought away.

Do you see congregation - that is one tremendous sermon here: God the Lord dates His covenant faithfulness of today to the covenant PAST of His people. In this miracle He fastens this miracle to the miracle of the past. He binds them together. He arranges it so that the annual remembrance of the departure from Egypt - for which He had given a clear mandate - from now on also commemorated the entrance into Canaan. In THIS the Lord proclaims that ALL His saving acts are one. A continuous act of salvation is formed so to speak.

The tenth of Nisan: that is the day of Passover, the day of escaping God’s judgment. It is the day of the DEPARTURE from the house of bondage, the day for freedom and glory of the children of God.

Yes says the Lord, but the tenth of Nisan, that is from now on ALSO the day of PASSING BY through a miracle of God. The day of ENTERING into the land of rest. The day of inheriting what is reserved for the people of God. The Lord is now going to tie the facts of salvation history to each other by the dating of the monument of His faithfulness.

So in the first place today’s text preaches the UNITY of God’s salvation work in sacred history. And we do well to keep a sharp note of it today. The saving facts lie extended into each other says the Lord, in every continuing act of God. Every successive miracle of the Lord reaches back to what He was and had done for His people in the PAST. The Lord does not without further ado only give deliverance from the house of bondage. But according to His promise He ALSO binds that act to the miracle of the entrance into rest.

Do you want me to say it for the situation today? There is a continuous connection of God’s work. The Lord keeps to the calendar very accurately. In every reformation He is busy in His one great salvation work for the church!

This very encouraging on the one hand, also today, when we pay attention to opposition and difficulty in the life of God’s church. Then we can indeed maintain that what the Lord has done for us when He gave us freedom is proof of His permanent concern with His people. As far as numbers are concerned we stand in isolation. There are so many who do not let themselves be pulled along in the glory of God’s covenant, and more and more lose their footing! Yet at the same time we do not stand isolated when it concerns the unity of God’s works, and for what it has to do with the unity of His church throughout the ages.

On the other hand this fact is also a sharp admonition for us today. Because if the unity of God’s works is preached in THIS way, then the Lord also wants that we should remain in this faith, which was once delivered to the saints. So we may not only see that we are delivered from certain sins in a NEGATIVE way, but that we must be diligent to enter that rest POSITIVLY, in order to serve the Lord’s good pleasure. For the rest that remains for the people of God today is service to Him in all of life. It is the answer to His saving work through living, also church living, that is devoted to Him.

**TWO**

So if we have understood from our text, that this dating of God’s covenant faithfulness in relation to the covenant past is of the greatest importance, then we will also see as a result how the covenant present must be explained by it.

You know that Joshua HIMSELF placed twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan as a remembrance that the ark of the Lord has stood there. But you also read in this chapter that at the same time he gave another directive to the twelve men who were picked from the twelve tribes. These men had to take up twelve stones OUT of the Jordan and bring them to the camp on other side, and set them up. Our text reaches back to the occurrence that happened at the beginning of the chapter where it reads: Joshua set up twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan. Therefore when the complete miracle of the crossover has passed, and the people are publicly assembled together in the camp, then Joshua gives the instruction to make a memorial with these stones, to make a monument of the deeds of the Lord.

For these stones must remain speaking for the present. They must continuously put the people’s now in the light of the past: in the light of God’s saving work that He accomplished there and then. They must connect this memory to the works God had done in the past. Joshua knows: the generations will pass away. Within a century there will be no one who had gone through the Jordan on their own feet, or who had entered the promised land in order to occupy the inheritance.

Yet the coming generations must never forget the past. They must maintain it, not just as a piece of their famous patriotic history by which they nourish their national self-respect, but as a monument of what God has done. GOD, Who remains the Same, as the generations disappear. One hundred years after the entrance their will be no one anymore who can say I was there. Yet after one hundred years, and after a thousand years every Israelite must still know: The Lord our God is still exactly the Same as then.

So these stones still speak of the past; of God’s work then, and so they have the power of testimony in the present, for what He wants to do today.

For these twelve stones speak of the WONDER of grace, of the saving powers which were impossible with man, but which appeared possible with God. When Joshua sets up near the river bank he says to all of the next generation: Nothing will be impossible with God. Do not say in your heart: It is impossible. Never tend to calculation. For there is never an obstacle so great or the Lord will let you overcome it without difficulty. There is no darkness so black, or God will make the night as bright as day. You could come as people of the Lord everyday into unsolvable situations, before insurmountable difficulties and impossibilities. But always say; what is impossible with men is possible with God. The stones at Gilgal, on the banks of the Jordan speak of it.

This miracle of God’s covenant faithfulness in EVERY now of covenant history may not be forgotten. Twelve stones were placed at Gilgal, and that means that God’s complete church is preserved and brought into the land of rest through an unthought-of miracle of God’s grace. And if later the children ask the parents: “Father, mother, what is the meaning of these stones?” - Then the parents must answer: “Boys, girls, it is here that the great miracle from the Lord occurred, that He safely lead the church through the Jordan and brought them into the promised land.” therefore this place is named Gilgal, turned over that is. Because the Lord turned away the shame of Egypt.

There is still one more thing in out text that requires particular attention.

Joshua tells the people what they must answer when the children ask about the stones. And then it can be noted that the FATHERS must tell the children: The Lord has dried up the waters of the Jordan for YOU. Now there are many commentators who say: It is impossible that the parents must say this to their children. For then they would act as if the children had themselves gone through the Jordan. So they want to change the tense of these words so that it looks like only Joshua spoke them. But in this way the text is violated.

Because it clearly reads, that the parents must say it to the children: The Lord has dried up the waters of the Jordan for YOU.

That is what is so REMARKABLE here! For the church of today must know itself to be one with the church of old. And the church of the future must tie itself in faith to the present day church!

Also the more recent fathers have not traveled through the Jordan. But they will be able to speak in the faith, and therein know themselves one with God’s people of all ages.

For God’s work is not only meaningful for one generation, but God’s past miracles must also affect the FOLLOWING generations. It is ONE people who experience all God’s deeds of salvation.

Therefore the Bible knows only of facts which have significance for today.

Therefore this instruction for the next generation, for the children of the church, is also so extremely important. They may not act as if history only starts with them, and as if God’s past wonders do not explain the covenant now!

Look congregation, let us understand this well today. Israel must keep alive the memories of the great deeds of the Lord in the history of His people, and know itself as one with the whole of God’s people. The monument served for that purpose. In THAT sense we no longer set up any monuments. But we shall, as God’s people upon whom the end of the ages fall, none the less keep alive the memories of the great deeds of the Lord in the history of His church.

This is first the task of the parents regarding their children. And this is a task that you all have taken up at the baptismal font, that also you would speak to the children about the works of the Lord yourself. This also includes, brothers and sisters, that you talk about the acts of the Lord in the history of the church with your children. This does not have to happen with learned and complex argumentation. You have to but let it be seen what JOY it is that the Lord has preserved His church throughout the ages!

I believe that it can be shown that things are alarmingly amiss as far as this is concerned. And I also believe that it will go wrong in a church where the parents do not point out God’s rich deeds. And remember well: as people of God we stand before terrible obstacles; the difficulties, according to human thinking are insurmountably great. It is a HARD thing to keep the church pathways pure, and to do what is according to the Lord’s good pleasure.

But if today people are filled with the question of what tomorrow will bring, if everybody asks themselves what will become of our children in SUCH a world as the one we live in now - then the Scripture admonishes us this morning to think first about the past history of the church. Let the monument of God’s faithfulness, which He gave then, clarify the covenant now, today. God’s people have stood before unnamable obstacles before, and yet moved beyond them.

Because with the Lord nothing is impossible. Whoever does not forget the Lord’s deeds of yesterday, knows that the Lord is ALSO the Same today and tomorrow with undreamed of and unexpected saving power for the people that hope on Him.

**THREE**

We are now come to the last part at the same time. For the monument of God’s covenant faithfulness also preaches for the covenant future. Don’t we read in the conclusion of the text: “So that all the people of the earth should know the hand of the Lord, that it is strong, and who would not fear the Lord their God all the days”? With this the last verse immediately gives the universal significance of this monument, for the future of the covenant.

Then the text deals first with the fear and terror which will overcome the nations of Canaan when they see the mighty acts of God. When you read the beginning of the following chapter you see this come to fulfillment; the Canaanite nations have no more courage before the face of the Israelites, and their hearts melted when they heard of God’s deeds. But the preaching goes even further: this monument is a testimony for ALL nations, for the nations that will come and confess God’s name. For the Lord’s strong right hand makes the WORLD tremble by His acts.

God’s acts of salvation go out to all the world: they give the preaching of salvation that exalts the whole circumference of the earth. The monument at Gilgal is not only set up to declare God’s deeds for the PRESENT, but also with the intention that the NATIONS praise the Lord in the future. For the complete church community which will come when the church breaks out of the borders of country and national dependence, and when the great multitude comes from all generations and languages and people and nations.

I also say it again today, congregation: it is significant for the whole future of the church when we hold fast to the deeds of the Lord. It then also has significance for the world which drifts away from God, yet which must be sought for the Lord’s service.

Sometimes some ask: what does the world think of all the division and church struggle? Well congregation, it is terrible if we pay attention to the SINS of the church. But if you see the preserving hand of the Lord, who keeps His church, then the questions CHANGES. Then you might ask: which meaning, what preaching and what testimony do we give to the world through the church. How great it is when the Lord keeps His church effective in and through that struggle. How that must press toward fear of the Lord for US and the nations!

Do you want to live in the joy of faith, which the Lord has given you. Then do no forget the monuments of God’s faithfulness; but pray and work for descendents which guard His covenant and Words, and which is kept from the apostasy of the former generation, and which asks Him for His power. And God in heaven will give His MIRACLE that His church is gathered from every generation, and that life in church bears fruit in former and later generations, living from the Psalm which is their daily joy:

*I will remember the deeds of the Lord, yes I will remember Thy wonders of old, and speak about all Thy works and take Thy deeds to heart.*

Oh God! Thy way is in holiness, Who is a God as great as God?

Thy art that God, who works miracles. Thou hast made known Thy power among the nations.

**Amen.**

Taken from “Waarheid and Recht” , 33rd sermon series 1977.

Read ~ Joshua 3

Text ~ Joshua 4: 19-24

Sing: (Dutch)

Ps. 97: 1;

Ps. 97: 5, 6;

Ps. 78: 1, 2, 3;

Ps. 77: 2

Ps. 77: 4