

The Blessed Assurance

What do these stones mean? **What, do these stones mean?** This is a question with as many answers as there are people in the room. Each of us though answering differently will all answer correctly. This is not like taking a test where there is only one correct answer. Some people may answer the question in only a few sentences while others need a book to tell their story. I can't answer the question for you, I can only tell you about the stones in my life. For me, it's a story of faith and growing up as a preacher's kid in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

I brought a couple of stones with me that represent a part of my story. This small one represents the first 3 years of my life where my spiritual journey and assurance that God had a purpose for me began. My earliest memories are from living at Caulksville, AR where my Dad was pastor. It was there that I was baptized by Rev. Helen Coleburn. It was there that I learned to walk and talk. I also learned that if you play in the street you'll get run over by a pickup truck. My other stone is a petrified rock from the sand hill where I grew up, married and raised my family. Experiences gained as a preacher's kid and listening to the stories my parents told, taught me to have faith and trust in the Lord and assured me that no matter what, God is always there!

I love the Hymn, Blessed Assurance. *"This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long."* Wait a minute! We're talking about life...things happen. Can we really sing praises all the day long? We praise God when things are going well, but what about the bad days. Some days we just don't feel an attitude of praise. We hear of so much sickness and disaster. Our prayer lists grow longer and longer. We spend more time bringing Him our requests than our praises. We grieve when friends and family members die. Even when we know we will see them again, we have a hard time praising God. We see tragedy like the flood in Arkansas last week that claimed the lives of people that were out just trying to enjoy life with their families. These things bring us so much sadness. Things happen and conflicts arise in our churches and families. What is there to praise God about then? How can we praise God with hurt feelings and damaged relationships and sorrow for these families that were drowned in the night? There are so many people losing jobs around us. It is hard to praise God when we don't know where the grocery money is coming from. We allow these things to come between us and God when we stop praising him.

My husband was self-employed for 30 years until his job shut down last year. We would like to blame the economy as the reason, but looking back a year later, we can see that God had a plan for us that did not involve that job. When the job shut down we did some real heavy praying, but it took a little time before we felt like praising. How do you praise God when your world falls apart? God began showing us that He was in control. We saw Him at work in little things in our lives.

In our call to worship today we thanked God for quilts. A couple months back a truck driver from Emmett AR came in the office where I work. I knew he would be back again the next day so I carried a friendship quilt to show him that I inherited from my parents. He was amazed at finding the names of people he knew about on the quilt. The quilt was given to Mom and Dad during their early years of preaching at the Emmett C.P. Church, which no longer exists. The ladies of the church embroidered their names on their blocks and also the date December 25, 1951. The names didn't mean anything to me because I didn't know any of them. The quilt was a remembrance to me of my parent's life in ministry and their stories. Last week two ladies and their husbands came to my office wanting to see the quilt. They turned out to be the granddaughters of a lady whose name was on the quilt. They found names of aunts, cousins, and a teacher that they had known and loved. I quickly saw that they would cherish owning the quilt. Yes, you guessed it! I sold them the quilt. What do these stones mean? Memories, new relationships, letting go of something we have to help someone else. What were the chances of our meeting had God not had a part in it? I believe that until we learn to look for God in the little things we won't see Him in the big things.

God has shown me that as long as the SON is shining in my life. It doesn't matter if things look cloudy around you, the SON is still shining! It becomes easier each day to praise God when we remember all that He has done. Trials will continue to come in our lives, but when we belong to God, we can have that Blessed Assurance that He will carry us through. Growing up I remember my Dad always quoted Romans 8:28 when bad things happened. "And we know, that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Another of my favorite verses is, Habakkuk 3:17-18, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

Habakkuk has learned the lesson of faith to trust in God's providence regardless of circumstances. He declares that even if God should send suffering and loss, he would still rejoice in his Savior-God. This is one of the strongest affirmations of faith in all Scripture." (NIV Study Bible notes)

We studied the text from Joshua 4:1-9 and found that the stones were to be a memorial. God knows that we are a forgetful people. He wanted to make sure that His people remembered all that He did for them. All through the Bible we are told to remember how God cares for His people. We are reminded to be thankful and to praise God for deliverance. John 14:26 says that the Holy Spirit was sent to teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." God told the Israelites to take up stones to remember. He gave us His spirit. Have we continued to carry the stones and teach our children about God? Our purpose on earth is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We've studied this past year how we are "Gifted to Serve." The question now is, how does God gift us to serve? Sometimes it is through our circumstances that we learn and grow the most. The Israelites faced many trials along their journey, but God was faithful with his covenant to them.

Let's look at the last verse of the song Blessed Assurance. "Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest; Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love." This may be the answer to a lot of our problems. Perfect submission is hard. We aren't perfect people and we don't live in a perfect world. The Israelites failed, and so do we, but, we have a promise in Hebrews 8:12 that God will forgive our wickedness and will remember our sins no more. We are told to remember the Sabbath to keep it Holy. Scripture tells us to, "Do this in remembrance of me" when we celebrate communion. God wants us to remember how much he loves us.

As we celebrate the 200th Birthday of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church this year we can ponder this question, "What Do These Stones Mean?" It is a time to remember the stories from the past and build our own stories for the future. If we don't serve as we've been gifted to do and praise our Lord, the word tells us in Luke 19:40, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." I don't want the stones having to cry out my praises. As long as the SON is shining in me, I will praise the Lord!

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