

## **The Standing Stones**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Well today we are finishing a series called Remember the Quarry. And this is a citing of a scripture in Isaiah that tells us to remember the quarry from which we were taken. That there is this image that we were pulled from a quarry as rough stones, and that over time, the Lord will craft us and shape us into the masterpieces we're to become. But that that crafting and that chiseling can sometimes be very difficult.

We remember the quarry, though, because we remember the stories, the stories of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Jacob, and Joshua, and the 12 tribes, and Joseph, and David and Solomon and the Lord, and Paul and Peter, and all of these giants of the faith that came before us, we remember them, not because they broke records, not because of the wealth that they had, not because they had trophies or because they had something built in their name, we remember them because they worked for the Lord. They worked on His behalf and they worked for their neighbor. We remember them imperfect, for sure. I mean you look at Moses and David and Abraham, and these are people who seriously had some flaws. We don't remember them because they're perfect. We remember them because even in their imperfections, they

made it a point to continue to live their life for the Lord, and live their life for their neighbor and we can look to them and remember that that is the best life we can live.

Today I want to finish talking about this idea of a standing stone. That all of us are building memorials. We're doing our best to build things and to do things in our life, no matter how young we are or how old we are, many of us have this unconscious need to be remembered. And the need to be remembered is a symbol of my life mattered; my life made a difference. My life had an impact. And the world will tell you one life that makes an impact, and the scriptures will tell you a different life that makes an impact. That's the life I want to tell you about today. I believe you already know it. I believe many of you are already living it, but I want to encourage you to continue to live the life that scripture teaches us – a memorable, meaningful life; a life that's lived with all your heart and all your soul and all your might for the Lord, and a life that's lived to love your neighbor as yourself. This is what the scripture calls us to do. This is a happy life – one that's worth living.

It's interesting because in Israel, if you were to go on a tour, there was in the 90's the discovery of a space called Tel Gezer. Now if you go to Israel or any place in the ancient world, it's very interesting when you go to deserts and plains, you'll have a flat plain: grassland, or a flat desert, just sand everywhere, and then out of nowhere, seemingly, you'll have a 50/60/70 foot hill that looks like a zit on the face of the land. I mean it

just doesn't make sense. Why is this thing sticking out? And those hills are called tells. What typically happened was some ancient civilization built a little small town, and then some big guy came and destroyed it and they built a new town, and then they got destroyed and a new town, and they destroyed a new town, and so what you see it's like a turkey sandwich of civilization. You have sometimes 60 or 70 layers of different peoples and civilizations that destroyed one on top of another to the point that it made a hill which makes the place more desirable because from a military standpoint, if you've got a flat plain and a big hill in the middle of nowhere, that's a pretty cool thing.

And so one of these tells that they were excavating in Israel, they found a bunch of these standing stones. Bring that picture up one more time for me. These standing stones, some of them, the ones in this picture are not quite this big, but these are sometimes 20 or 30 feet high. These particular stones are 5,000 years old from the early bronze era. And what happened was when a great feat was accomplished in the ancient world they would bring in these stones and then stand them up so that when people came, they would say what happened here? And then people could say oh this is when our village defeated our neighbors. Or sometime it was really evil stuff. This is when we killed a thousand children to Baal or something like that.

And when the Jews came in, they destroyed most of these pagan stones, but continued the practice of putting up standing stones, so in

Tel Gezer they found a standing stone commemorating something David had done, which was interesting because there's no reference of David in Tel Gezer in the Bible, so there's all sorts of interesting things like that.

And the reason I begin there is we're going to talk more in the scriptures about standing stones, but in general, you see throughout history people trying to put up things to kind of reinforce this idea – see, my life mattered! See, I did something important! The ancient world is full of statues of famous people. The Roman Empire famously put up the Arc de Triomphe and even today, we have all sorts of trophies and awards and plaques, and please hear me, there's nothing wrong with that.

All I'm pointing to is an inner desire that we all have to show that the effort or the accomplishment that we have is worth remembering. And I want to tell you that many of the things that the modern world will tell you is worth living for, is worth attaining, it's not worth it. In fact, some of it is worthless. Some of it is even garbage. But to live your life completely for the Lord, to live your life for your family, for your kids or your spouse, your marriage, to live your life for your hurting neighbors, to even live your life to encourage your enemies to turn to what is good, man, that is a life worth living. That is worth getting up in the morning for. When you live your life for others and for the Lord, people will tell your story for you. You won't have to put up a stone. You won't have to put up a statue. You'll remember what you did and it will matter.

And maybe some of you here are saying it's too late for me. I've done too many rotten things or I'm too old or I'm too this or that, it's never too late. If you're alive, God has a reason and a purpose ahead of you and my hope today is that we can begin every day. It's like hygiene. It's like brushing our teeth. That every day we must recalibrate and remember that all these things that the world says are important, many of them just don't matter. But the things that scripture points to are important. Those are the things. When we get to the end of our life, these are going to be the things that really matter. And it's never too late for you. And I want to encourage you – choose today to chase after the Lord, and choose today to chase after the people that really matter in your life. I know you already are doing it, some of you. I want to encourage you to keep doing that.

So our world, they have all these accolades and awards and all of them are fun. I mean I love sports. It's super enjoyable and I love looking at those things, but the great artists of the world, and the great athletes of the world, the great business titans of the world, and achievers and writers, how many of them at the loftiest point of their career, when they have all the money in the world, and all the glory and have achieved everything, how many of them must we hear say its worthless! I got all this stuff and it didn't matter! And now I don't know what to do with my life. How many times do we have to hear that story until we believe them? Until we learn from their mistakes? Until we learn that although

those things are fun and they're interesting and its okay to pursue those things, that there's something better that all of us can attain! And we don't need to be wealthy and famous. That there is this thing that Christ offers us, that the Lord offers us when we follow Him, that we can live a life worth living by living for one person, not a million.

When we live for the one or two people, or sometimes ten people that God's called us to, we're doing what is good and right and something that will be remembered. It will remember here, but even more importantly, it'll be remembered in heaven, and God won't forget it and He won't forget you.

So all these accolades we have. I remember when I was a kid in elementary school/junior high, I had a Nintendo entertainment system, the original gangster. Eight bits. It was very solid. One of my favorite games was "Mike Tyson's Punch Out" and this was a boxing game. I think you're supposed to be Rocky Balboa. You're like this tiny guy, and he has to kind of go up the chain of boxing and you have to beat all these different guys like Glass Jaw Joe and different people, and when you finally get to the last guy, it's this giant hulking Mike Tyson. Then you have to beat Mike Tyson and to be honest with you, I'm ashamed to say that in my entire life, I was never able to beat Mike Tyson on "Mike Tyson's Punch Out." Maybe one of these days I'll get an old Nintendo and I'll figure it out.

But as silly as this sounds, when you're a kid, these things get emblazoned on your mind, and because of that, I started watching boxing with my Uncle Jeff, who was a huge boxing fan. Whenever there was a big match, he would always get the pay-per-view thing and invite the family over, and we would watch all these matches. And I remember multiple times seeing Mike Tyson fight and just thinking whoa. I remember one time, I think it was 37-seconds after the event began, the event was over. And I thought wow, that was a lot of money for just a little bit of entertainment. At least the BBQ's good.

Mike Tyson is considered one of the greatest boxers of all time, second probably only to Mohammed Ali. I don't know a ton about boxing, but I know he was the youngest boxer ever to attain a heavyweight title. He won his first 19 fights, and 12 of them were absolute knockouts. He's the first guy to get a WBA, WBC and IBF title at the same time. And when he was winning, he was the Michael Jordan of boxing, just one of the greatest athletes anyone had ever seen.

And it was so funny because years later, I was watching the news and I forget passing by, and I saw this story, and I've never forgotten it.

Watch this:

(VIDEO ROLL IN: Look at this stuff. This is history here. You are history. This is garbage. I can say I bled for garbage. So this is meaningless. No, at one time it meant a lot. When you're just a young kid this is everything to you. I didn't even realize yet. Priorities change and you just

want your children to be happy and do nice things, and that makes you happy. This is nothing. This is just nothing, man.)

Isn't that powerful? I bled for garbage, and he flips the title belt with contempt. I bled for garbage. And let's not try and pursue lives like that. I mean boxing is great, and sports are great. I think sports are especially really good for kids, and I think winning and learning to win or play on a team, all of that is commendable and useful and helpful, but at the end of the day, and maybe this is an American thing, too, we're just so obsessed with winning at things sometimes that don't matter, and we lose the things that really matter.

I want to invite Pastor Russ Jacobson to come up. I've told Russ' story before about a year ago, but I'd like for him to just share this story real quick. And I remember meeting Russ at our church, and as I got to know Russ better, I found out man, Russ is this pretty successful running an accounting firm that has some pretty impressive clients, and yet I noticed that as busy and successful as he was, like he always put the church first, and he always put especially his family first. And if you know a family guy, I guarantee the best he's going to get is equal to Russ. I mean Russ has three kids and he and his amazing wife Deanna do such a great job with their family. They're always going on trips; they're always doing things together as a family. They love the Lord as a family and I just enjoy Russ so much.

And I remember him telling a story as to how he came to a place when these priorities sort of got straight. And Russ, I just would love for you to share that story.

RUSS: Yes, well thank you for that introduction. I was the chaplain at a senior living facility, a very nice senior living facility and they basically had three phases there. One was their independent living, and the second was sort of an apartment which was supervised, and then they had this skilled care facility. And so I remember just being there and meeting some people there, and just being amazed by how their lives had shrunk over time. And when you just see how people had these huge jobs, and these huge houses, and these massive responsibilities, and these important things that they had accomplished just like that, and you get them at the end, and it really didn't mean anything to them.

So I remember one person in particular had been the chancellor of a university here in Southern California. I remember wanting to ask him what was that like to run a university? It's like running a small city. And he just wasn't interested in chatting about it. It just didn't mean anything to him at that point and he just was alone.

And then on the other side, the flip side, there are people who had been involved in churches, they were elders, they went to church, they read their scripture, they had active prayer lives, and those were the people who did very well there. They had activities and relationships and

they were involved in things outside themselves, and those people thrived there.

And so you talk about what that looks like, friends, no matter what you've accumulated or accomplished or gathered in your life over time, whatever the accomplishments, eventually you're going to come down to this one room that can't hold a lot of stuff and it can't hold a lot of memories, so I was basically faced with option A or option B, kind of like "A Christmas Carol;" a glimpse of the future. Which do you want? And for me, it was I wanted to invest in my family, I wanted to invest in my children, I wanted to invest in those relationships because when you come down to it, those are the things that really matter.

BS: Russ, thank you so much. Let's give him a hand. We appreciate you, sir. And some of us don't have kids, or some of us aren't married, and that's okay because at the end of the day, there are still key relationships in our life where we can make a big impact. And a lot of times, we need to seek deeper into our relationship with God, and He will reveal to us, or even bring to us some of those key relationships that make all the difference. At the end of the day, I'm just going to commit to you that we want to, as the saying goes, begin with the end of mind. That today is a new day. We can forget what was behind. And maybe you've made a bunch of mistakes. Maybe you've ruined a bunch of relationships. It's never too late to turn your heart to the Lord and to

commit with Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

It's interesting how things like funerals can help us recalibrate and do some hygiene in terms of our priorities. Recently, we had a good friend of our family, great friend of my dad's, who's only 55-years-old, very, very successful man, very wealthy man, had been born in a wealthy family, was wealthy his whole life, and seemed healthy to me, and at 55, in the middle of the night, he like went downstairs to get a glass of water, and he had a heart attack and he died. And so we had this funeral and all these people came out, and it was a very high class gathering, a mix of some wealthy elite people from Orange County, a lot of that type of person, some of them really good people, and other people like from church or from the school. His son was my daughter's age. They were classmates at school.

And it was interesting to hear people from different parts of this man's life. This is what was weird is when I listened to these different speeches, it almost sounded like each one was painting a different picture of the same person. None of them contradicted each other, they just seemed to highlight the things almost that like mattered to them. So like one of the early guys, I'm sure he's a great person, a nice person, but it was interesting because everything he talked about with his friend who had passed away, was all the fun stuff he did: boats and this type of thing. And when I heard it, it sounded sort of sad to me, in a way. Do

you know what I mean by that? And I didn't feel sad for my friend who had died, I felt sad for the guy who was saying it. It's almost like he didn't know that the other stuff that this guy had done, was more important.

My dad was invited to speak, and the widow was invited to speak, and other pastors invited to speak, and what they said was what mattered: he was a great father; that he gave generously to organizations that needed him. What I remember about this guy is he just loved kids. I remember he had this golf cart and he'd drive around the neighborhood on Halloween and he would have like ten kids hanging off, which I love stuff like that. They're all having fun and they're eating candy, and he's like YEAH! That's the stuff I think that anyone can be and anyone can do, and that is the stuff that matters. And I just still remember, too, that my dad and the pastor, they both talked about his faith and his commitment to his family, and they especially gave an invitation for people to receive the Lord, and I thought that was such a good thing to do. Such a good thing to do.

All of this to say that your life is a standing stone. It's a standing stone. That your life is either going to point to the achievements that the world thinks is important: wealth and success and titles, and those things are important, or its going to point to the things that are more important than that. That you invested in people. That you sought after God with all your heart. That you made a decision to turn your back on

the gods of this world and turn your heart completely to Him, and to live for Him with all your heart and with all your soul. And I promise you, friend, if you only have a day left to live, and you make that decision today, you'll be glad that you lived at least one day well. These are the days that matter. The days we live for the Lord, and the days we live for others. I believe you're living your life well for others. Keep doing it. Keep pressing in towards Him and pressing in for your family.

So I'll just end with this. The Bible is full of these standing stones. When Jacob saw the Lord ascending and descending, and angels on the hill that's called Bethel, he was so struck that he put up one of these stones and said Lord, I'll never forget. And when somebody comes by here, they'll call this place Bethel, the house of God because God came to this place.

When Moses was given the Ten Commandments, he was so struck by it that he put up 12 standing stones, one for each tribe of Israel and said that when people come by here and they ask what are these stones about, they'll say the Lord was in this place, and He gave us Ten Commandments for how to be and how to live rightly.

When Joshua crossed the Jordan River and he carried with him the ark, he put up this standing stones, and they said we will never forget that God carried us from a faraway land into this Promised Land, and gave us this place.

And actually Joshua is a great place to finish. Joshua, when he arrives in the Promised Land, he sort of enters in a younger man and he finishes a very old man, and a lot happens between them – fighting and difficulty and rebellion and people wanting to turn their hearts to other gods. And finally at the very end of Joshua, he begins to divvy out the land to these various tribes and set all the rules and boundaries for where they're going to be, and how they're going to live.

And then finally Joshua gives this speech. He takes them up on a hill and he reminds them that God brought their father Abraham out of a distant land. That Abraham left the gods of his father Terah, and embraced the Lord Almighty with all his heart. And that God brought the people out of Egypt and that many turned their hearts back to Egypt, but some who were there left and turned their hearts against those gods, and came to this place, this Promised Land, this gift where heaven would be reigned and hell would be boxed out.

And he gives them this speech. He says after all of that, and all the vacillating that we of a people have done of looking to Egypt and looking here, looking to the pagan gods of our fathers, or looking to Yahweh, Joshua finally says enough! Enough! Make a decision today! Enough! He says “now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestor worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day, today, whom you will serve.

Whether the gods of your ancestors serve beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

And then the people cry out and they say we will serve the Lord. And what’s hilarious is Joshua looks back and he goes no you won’t. Imagine I did that. Imagine I gave an altar call and I said who wants to come and come before the.. a bunch of people came down, I was like no, you’re not going to.. I can tell. Go back, go back to your seat. I can just tell.

Joshua says no you won’t. You won’t serve the Lord. You’ll continue to go back and forth. And they say far be it from us. We will, we will serve the Lord. And he’s like are you sure? They’re like yes, we will serve the Lord. And then he says fine, fine. We’ll make a decision, you’ll serve the Lord, and he says yield your hearts completely to the Lord. And they say we will. And then he says all right. I’ll put up one more standing stone, this gigantic stone and he says let this be a testimony against us if we ever turn our hearts to other gods and turn our hearts away from the Lord. And they say amen.

Let it be so for us. May we never turn our hearts from the Lord. May we never turn our heart from what matters. May we love the Lord with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength. May we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and continue to pour out daily as much as we can for Him and for them. If we do that, if you do that, your life will

be a true standing stone. One that will matter. One that will make a difference. One that will alter history. One that when you get to heaven, you'll recognize and notice, man, I'm so glad I made that decision. You will.

Just a couple of things before I end. Two things I want you to do today. You really want to live a life for God, and you really want to live a life for the people that matter, the first thing I want you to change is this: your calendar. I know it seems simple and silly, but life isn't changed by big monumental leaps, life is changed by daily, every day making small changes. Making decisions today that I won't be distracted by other things.

What we do in our personal life, Hannah and I have a date day every Monday. If you want a better marriage, get a date day on the calendar. I hang out with Haven and get breakfast with her every Wednesday. And when Disneyland was open, I would take Cohen to Disneyland every Saturday, and I still try and take him on little walks on Saturdays and stuff. Put it on the calendar. It doesn't mean that's going to be the only thing that you're going to do, but at least you'll do that.

Make a commitment to a church. Go every week. Why would you skip? It's a great experience. Make a commitment to go to church and to be with God's people. Give one hour to the Lord per week. It doesn't mean that's the only thing you do, but make a commitment to do that.

Put it on your calendar. Get lunch with your friends afterwards. It'll be a good experience.

If you hate your church, find a new church. Why are you sticking in a church you don't like? Find a great church. I know all of you will stay here but you know I'm talking about other churches. Our church is awesome. So if you want to change your life, change your calendar. I mean that.

Second thing: if you are not a person of faith, you don't know how much longer you're going to live. Make a decision today. You don't have to come down to an altar call. You don't have to stand up. You don't have to raise your hand. All you have to do is what I did. Is even quietly in your seat just decide, just decide today I choose the Lord. As for me and my house, we choose the Lord. We turn our back on all these other things, and I choose the Lord. I choose the Lord. Choose Him today, and you won't regret it. You'll be grateful when you come to the end of your life that standing by your side is Jesus Christ, the great advocate who will stand with you and say let this guy in. You'll be grateful that He's there with you.

Let's pray: Father, we pray in Jesus' name that as your disciples, flawed, distracted, hurting, some of us have illness, some of us have things that keep us up at night. In spite of all of that, we believe that we can have lives worth living if we live according to your word. Teach us, Father, what it means to love what is good and hate what is evil, and to

know the difference. And to live our lives completely for you and not for garbage. Help us to live completely for you, we pray. Father, we love you with all our heart, and it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.