

February 19, 2017 “Joshua: How we perceive and accept will change”

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Here at our church, our weekly messages have been on the theme, “Life’s Crisis Management.” We come across many crises within our lives. Within them are natural disasters and accidents. And there are those that we must face because of the actions we have taken or the decisions we have made. The crises we are focusing on in this series is the latter, and we have looked into the lives of people in the bible who have made such mistakes. I give these message praying and hoping that we may learn from them, and not make the same mistakes they have. But as we look into such crises, we do gain a sense of danger and caution, but our hearts also seem to wither. And so, from this point, I would like to include not only the mistakes they have made, but also their firm walk in faith. Today, we will focus our attention to a man named Joshua.

We learned of Moses, who led several million Israelites from slavery in Egypt through the wilderness. Even Moses is not immortal so there came a time when he needed to consider a successor.

Their destination from God was the land of Canaan. But Moses, who was the distinguished leader was called to heaven before he was able to see the promised land. And so God said to Moses, **“Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him.”** (Numbers 27:18) Moses had children. But what was wise of him was that he did not chose his own child as a successor, and chose Joshua as a successor and taught him all that he needed to know in order to lead the Israelites. When situations such as these do not go well, we find ourselves in deep family quarrels.

From this change of succession, we recognize that we ourselves can only live in one generation, the generation given to us by God. In other words, we have the duty of inheriting what has been built up by the previous generation, building upon it with our own accomplishments, and passing it down to the generation that follows.

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David, as the king of Israel, desired to construct the temple, but the one to actually carry it out was his son Solomon. The prophet Elijah’s work was succeeded by Elisha, who was given a greater portion of spiritual strength by God. John the baptist prepared way for Jesus, who began his ministry after him. John referred to Jesus as he lived the words “He must become greater; I must become less.” as he was called to heaven as if to change places with Jesus.

When we strive to acquire something, we cannot instantly acquire it. Time is essential, and a state of apprenticeship may be necessary. Whether it is a sales business, carpentry, or sushi chef, we first learn under a master, teacher, or superior figure, and make our way towards independence.

In the same way. Joshua stood besides Moses as a young helper, as written of in the bible. During that time, he observed Moses’ actions in great detail, learning the ways of a leader firsthand. In such experience, there was one instance he could not forget. That was the scene Joshua saw as he watched the Israelites fight under the command of Moses against the Amalekites. It is written of in Exodus 17:9-16

**9 Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.” 10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. 14 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.” 15 Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. 16 He said,**

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**“Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”**

During this time, the Israelites were at war with the Amalekites. Moses tells Joshua to go and fight the Amalekites. Yes, Moses must have wanted Joshua to gain experience as his successor. Joshua goes to fight as he is told, and he must have known how to fight as a soldier. He must have carefully strategized and trained every day the days leading up to the fight. And he won victory. Because Moses was not on the battlefield, he may have thought that they were not all that bad themselves.

But as he returned triumphantly, or maybe even the next day he learned that Moses had been praying with his hands held up, and that they had only been winning while his arms were up, and losing when they were down. And so he learns that the fight was won not by the strength of the soldiers who fought, but by the answering of God to Moses’ prayer.

Here, God says directly, **“Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it.”** If Joshua did not read or hear of this happening, he may have gone on to believe that the victory was won by their fighting spirit. And with such thoughts, Joshua would not have been able to become Moses’ successor.

This also applies to us at times. We may think that we did that, or we avoided a catastrophe. But when we learn that it was the prayers of others that God heard, we are humbled. That is when we know that we are safe when we are in the hands of God. I do not talk about such things very much, but this relates to our message. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, we gather together to worship, give testimonies, learn about the words of God, and pray. This pattern has been the same for a long time, and we have no plans to change them. We gather in small groups to pray at each of these meetings. At times we pray for our fellow brothers and sisters of the church, our family members, and of those we have never met yet. Even this morning, we prayed for the Lord’s blessings and safety upon us this day. If we think

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about it, we spend half of the week praying for each other. You could say that we pray just as Moses did with his hands held up. And God does answer our prayers. Just as it was for Joshua, we are healed, and problems are resolved. This is not by our own strength but the answering of prayers by God. To recognize this and walk with our eyes towards God is essential.

Joshua learned that a victory in battle is not based on military tactics or strength. In taking on the responsibilities as a successor to Moses, Joshua learned that victory is not achieved by the hands of man but is given to by God. And this piece of experience becomes a key to the foundation of his leadership. God wished for this to be firmly engraved in Joshua’s heart.

Psalms 20 was written by the second king of Israel, David. It is said to have derived from a prayer of intercession by a priest during a ceremony. Within it is the verse, **“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”** (7) David was also a warrior who went to battle. But he also says that victory is not won by chariots or horses but by the name of God.

There are various things we put our trust in. Things that we count as our strengths. But rather than putting our trust only on them, let us entrust ourselves to the all powerful and all knowing God. If any of you are beginning to notice that the things you relied on as your strength is no longer what you thought it was, this is your chance. There is one path to take. It is the walk with our Lord and savior.

It is written in Zechariah **“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.”** Let us engrave in our hearts that everything we achieve is not by our own power or vigor, but that they are by the power of God.

Now, of Joshua. God gave Joshua the chance to use and understand what he had learned in the battle against the Amalekites. God also gives us the chance to put what we have learned into practice. Have you ever heard that the greatest way to learn is to teach it as soon as it is learned to someone else? In the same way, it becomes a part of us when it is put to practice.

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This was the opportunity given to Joshua. The Israelites were in the land of Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. Moses had sent out 12 men including Joshua and Caleb to go and explore the land. When they returned, they report to Moses, all but Joshua and Caleb saying, **“28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”** (Numbers 13:28-29)

In regards, Joshua and Caleb reported the following. **“Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”** (Numbers 13:30-33)

About 2 weeks ago, I caught a cold, and not long after, my eldest son and daughter both showed similar symptoms. Luckily, it was not the flu, but even such cold is contagious. And It is not just colds that are contagious. Insecurity and fear, in other words, discontent is easily passed around from one person to another. A single person’s words can at times impact thousands of others. There are things called Tweets on the social media site Twitter, but a single disgruntle can instantly infect people from all around the world. It is a scary time we live in today. How did the Israelites react to the report given by the 10 men excluding Joshua and Caleb?

**“That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! 3 Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and**

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**children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” (Numbers 14:1-4)**

Fear had spread among them. They had lost their composure and cried that they would return to slaves. But to such fear Joshua and Caleb said, **“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” (Numbers 14:7-9)**

Those who had gone and seen the sight had said, **“All the people we saw there are of great size. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”** Yet, Joshua and Caleb who had seen the same sight gave a drastically different report saying **“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, from which perspective do you see this world? From which perspective do you view yourselves? Your children? Your future? Do you not see that this difference in perspective will determine the single life we have.

Mother Teresa once said, **“Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts become your words. Be careful of your words, for your words become your actions. Be careful of your actions, for your actions become your habits. Be careful of your habits, for your habits become your character. Be careful of your character, for your character becomes your destiny.”**

We all share the world we live in, and the things we see. And depending on how we take in these sights, our today's and tomorrow's will change. As we say that our

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thoughts become our destiny, what seemed like distress in the eyes of others reflected as a chance in Joshua’s eyes. Where did such thoughts come from? What caused such difference?

As we spoke of earlier, this was something that he had learned from the battle with the Amalekites. The people saw the enemy, then themselves, and feared. But even in such situation, Joshua saw the enemy through the presence of God with him. Yes, it was that no matter how the enemies were or they themselves were, they are ok as long as the Lord is with them. And for this, Joshua said that the most important thing is, **“do not rebel against the Lord.”** If it is his will, the land will be given to them. The most important thing is to be obedient. Joshua inherited from Moses the vital aspects of succeeding as a leader of the Israelites.

When we face any circumstance, how much do we put our trust in God? If we consider the situation without God in the picture, we are just the same as the spies who went to scout the land. Much like them, we will be discouraged by the reality before us, and lose all strength. But that is not who we are. We believe in the all knowing, all powerful God. Even in such situations, we trust in the working hands of God. That does not mean we sit back and do nothing. We are to ask God what we are to do, work hard upon it with all that we have, and expect God’s work to be done. Jesus Christ had once talked about the key to life as following.

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”** (John 15:1-5)

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Jesus boldly said, **“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me”** (4) **“apart from me you can do nothing”** (5)

This was what Joshua needed to obtain in order to succeed after Moses. Joshua was convicted that because God is with them, they will be given the promised land of Canaan. It was not of their military power, but the conviction that victory is won because God is with them. In the same way, the Lord is speaking to us saying, “remain in me and you will bear fruit.” Let us confirm the presence of God in the things we are currently working on, and the things we are about to begin working on. Let’s pray.

Translated by Shirah Vogt