

Leadership in Biblical Perspective
“Three Marks of Godly Leadership”
Hebrews 13:17
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We have come to a special time in the life of our congregation and I honestly do not know of a denomination with more definitive and Biblical vows of covenant membership than we enjoy in the PCA and some of our sister denominations. I also know that very profound are the vows that are taken for the leadership of the church. Now people can say one thing and do something else and the Lord deals with them on that basis but while it is possible that people hypocritically take vows and oaths, it is absolutely mandatory that we take sacred vows and oaths where God has called us to take sacred vows and oaths.

Sacred vows and oaths need to be remembered. God tells us why we have vows and oaths. For Christians the vow and the oath is not so much for themselves. Our yea shall be yea and our nay shall be nay but vows and oaths are for the benefits of others. When I entered into a covenant with a bank when I bought our house, I would have loved to have been able to tell them ‘I’m going to pay what I’m supposed to pay’ and as far as I was concerned I didn’t need that document or 38 lawyers to sign 38 verification documents to go along with it but I did gladly enter into that oath, that vow, not for my benefit, but for the people who were loaning us the money.

I would say to our officers that we have every confidence that God has given you a heart to do that which God has called you to. His people have recognized you and the Spirit of God internally has called you and externally through His church has assigned you to do but you take this, not only to declare the sacredness of your calling but you also take it to declare to God’s people that they can be assured that by God’s grace in reliance upon the power of His Spirit that God will provide for them, the leadership that is necessary for this church to be faithful to Christ through you to God’s glory.

I just want to give a couple of thoughts about leadership in this study. Ordination and installation services in a PCA church, as a member I was excited to get to one but was always a little uneasy when I came to one because you have a sermon, a charge to the officers and a charge to the congregation. Those are three speaking moments and that could turn into an interminable amount of time for each think people have come to hear what I have to say. I’m just going to give a leadership homily of three of the marks of effective leadership. These would be three marks for revival leaders for a revival in a church so that a church could live as it has been called to live Christ.

I want to start by looking at Joshua 5 and then I will draw these three marks of leadership out of this text. Here the people of Israel have been brought out of the exodus and 40 years in the wilderness. They have crossed over the River Jordan and Moses has gone to be with the Lord. Now they are being led by those who have been discipled by Moses, and that is Joshua and Caleb but in particular Joshua.

Joshua 5:13–15 says [13] *When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” [14] And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on*

his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" [15] And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

The crossing of the River Jordan towards Jericho was a miraculous crossing that mirrored the Red Sea because the Jordan River parted as Joshua led them across onto dry land. We don't really know how many people there were with Joshua. There are estimates that range from 500,000 to two million but he brought them over after 40 years to the Promised Land and that was the very picture of Jesus Christ Himself. The Promised Land was where God would secure them and sustain them. That is also pointing to Jesus Christ in whom we are secured and sustained.

As they cross Joshua is looking at arguably the oldest city in antiquity and it has high walls. It is inhabited by a warlike people. These are people who have withstood assaults by all kinds of nations because it was right on the trade route in this land bridge as it were. God has promised them this city and so they have to take it. After God gives them this city they are to go into the middle of this Promised Land to two mountains, Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. There they will receive the blessings and the cursings that are shouted from those two mountains. That is what the plan is but now they are at Jericho to take that city.

On the eve of a battle or even the eve of a big sports game, it is a very traumatic time. So what would this moment have been like and the feeling of that moment for Joshua on the eve of taking over Jericho? Joshua is out surveying the battlefield before Jericho. He sees a warrior that is fully equipped and ready for battle for his sword is drawn. What does Joshua leading a vagabond tribe out of the wilderness think of this man? He sees a recruit. He starts to recruit this man by asking him a diagnostic question; are you for us or for our adversaries? The man answers 'no.' What an answer! No, what? No, you're not for us? No, you're not for our adversaries? What do you mean 'no'?

There was a program on television when I was growing up called the 'Gong Show.' The answer this man gave was a 'gong' moment. The answer was saying to Joshua, wrong question. The question you ought to be asking me is not am I on your side but are you on my side? He told Joshua he was the Captain of the Army of the Lord and that he had come ready to do battle, to lead his army the Army of the Lord. It is not your army, Joshua, it's My Army. Joshua immediately submits. Joshua is also instructed to take his shoes off because he is standing on holy ground. There's an echo of forty years.

What was Moses instructed when he had been called of the Lord to lead His people under His direction and by His power? You are standing on holy ground. Take off your shoes. Joshua has not only led them through the Jordan with the reflection of the miracle of the Red Sea but he has now led them ready for the battle. Now comes the reflection of the same call that had been placed on Moses. In My presence you are on sacred ground and that's why Joshua recognizes it and then gives the man his title by saying, 'Lord, here is your servant. I am here to do what You have commanded.' I love the way it ends when it says 'and he did so.'

There are multiple lessons we could learn from this but there are three that I'd like to simply draw out for you. I have a real empathy for Joshua. I want to explain what I mean this way. Do you know who Phil Bengston is? Not many know this name. Do you know who Vince Lombardi is? Many more of you probably know this name. Phil Bengston followed Vince Lombardi which is maybe why many don't know who Phil Bengston is. Phil disappears in the annals of history in the light of who preceded him. How would you like to follow Moses?

Joshua is following Moses. Forget Vince Lombardi because he did not walk on water or part rivers. What a task, a challenge that is before Joshua? It kind of reminds me of a minister that was in Charlotte, North Carolina, when they asked me to pray about following Frank Barker as senior pastor at Briarwood. I have already seen what people do in Alabama to people who follow legends and I'm not sure I want to come there. So here is the challenge that is before Joshua.

Joshua is looking for recruits but he finds out something about leadership instead. Here are three thoughts. One, is effective Christian leaders know that they are always at most 'second' in command, never in command. It does not matter their place or their calling. At most they are second in command and most of the time they are not even second. That is one of the things I love about being Presbyterian is that we always have someone to be accountable to and I praise the Lord for that so that we can be submissive to one another. I am the Commander of the Lord's Army Joshua and I recruited you, you don't recruit me. That is I Am in command. The Lord is in command.

Secondly, is we are to be obedient to His commands no matter what it may look like to the world. We are to obey His mission and the strategy He has given for that mission. You are now about to take your place in the annals of the great commanders in the history of humanity. Is there are Caesar? Will there be a Napoleon or a George Washington? There are amazing commanders that are going to dot all of history and not the least of which will be Joshua. Joshua's very first battle will be for a walled city. So his objective is that city. Can't we flank it and isolate it? No, you have to take and there's your mission. You can't run from it.

How are we going to take it? We're going to march out the priests. What? The priests will march out for six days around the city and blow a trumpet. Then on the seventh day they will march around it seven times, blow a trumpet and then all the people will shout that the city has been given over to them and the choir will also go out with them. What an army we have going here! As they rise up with the shout I, the Lord, will give them the city. What a plan!

We are submissive to our Commander in the mission and the strategy. We are going to take the Gospel to the kingdoms of this world and sweep them into the Kingdom of God. How are we going to do that? This army is going to march on its knees. We are going to pray them in. By the way, we are going to preach the Word of God and the world calls this foolishness both the message and the means of preaching but that's my strategy. We are going to evangelize and disciple. We will be willingly persecuted but we are going to fix our eyes on Jesus. Our leaders are going to lead the way. They are going to follow me to bring you to give you the glorious success of the Kingdom throughout the kingdoms of this world. To recap, we are always second in command. Two is we always know Christian leaders because they submit to the Lord's mission as He has revealed it and the Lord's means/strategy as He has revealed it. That is what Joshua did as he was commanded.

Thirdly, great leadership is always a subset of worship. Take your sandals off for you are on holy ground – worship. It is out of worship that Joshua goes into the battle. The only thing that the God who seeks us to save us then tells us He seeks from us true worshippers. Our leaders lead the way for God's people to live in worship, gather in worship and worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth. Those are the three marks I wanted to point out to you from Joshua but there are many more marks from the Word of God concerning that which is effective, true and successful worship before the Lord.

When God calls a leader God will affirm that leader. When God affirms a leader, just as He is affirming Joshua, He will always develop that leader. Dr. Pinson told us 'be mentored

and be a mentor.’ Joshua doesn’t just happen here. God has called him and Moses nurtured him. Great leaders are always producing leaders who know they are second in command and producing leaders who follow them as they have obeyed God’s revealed mission and strategy. They are producing leaders that know leadership is a subset. Great leaders are worshippers of the living God. Those leaders are developed. They don’t just happen. Great leaders are always making sure they are there to take their place.

So David we’re going to call you on home. Anybody left to take David’s place? Yes, here are three chief men and thirty mighty men. Elijah we’re going to call you on home. Here is Elisha and the school of the prophets. Paul we’re going to call you on home. Here is Silas, Timothy, Titus, Luke, leading women, Aquila and Priscilla. I’m ready to go. Jesus You are going to ascend in victory. Here are the three, the twelve and the seventy. Moses, you are not going to the Promised Land but the legacy of Moses goes on to the Promised Land. Here are Joshua, Caleb and the elders of the tribes.

What do those leaders look like? They know they are not in command. They are second in command. The Commander is the Lord Himself. The Captain of the Army that shows Himself to Joshua is what we call in the Old Testament a theophany and more precisely a Christophany, meaning a pre-incarnation, appearance of Christ. Normally when He comes He is identified in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord, not ‘an Angel’ but ‘the’ Angel of the Lord. Here He is called the Captain of the Lord’s Army. He is in command. We are under His command.

We are committed to what He has revealed as our mission – go and make disciples of all the nations. My dear officers, here is a charge I’d like to give you. This church has distilled from four verses the mission Christ has given to us. The mission is for God’s glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. Lead us on that mission. We didn’t come up with it. It’s in Matthew 28, Acts 1, Colossians 1 and Ephesians 4. This is our commission our Commander has given us. We are under His command so lead us in the mission and lead us in a strategy of Gospel evangelism and discipleship, Gospel church planting and revitalization, Gospel deeds that lift up the Gospel of grace, mercy and justice, Gospel leaders multiplied, matured and mobilized. The way you lead us is to lead us in worship, out of worship and to worship of our Triune God. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we have been able to look at this one little incident which has so much more to teach us about leadership but it is something that lays out for us at least some of the perimeters that identify the leaders that You have called and affirmed, even as You called Joshua and affirmed him. We rejoice in what You have done and how You have done it Father. I thank You so much for the leaders over the past 57 years in this church from a founding pastor to the founding elders, the first class of deacons and all that have followed since then. God, You have done great things through them and we want to give You the glory because none of them or us have ever been in command. We are under Your command. We haven’t come up with our own mission, nor do we want to drift from the mission You have revealed. Our strategy has been given to us so that the world could be turned upside down with the Gospel of saving grace in Christ. God, we want to lead from worship as an act of worship and to worship and that the Gospel would bring true worshippers from leaders who are Gospel-motivated worshippers of the Triune God. We give You praise Father, through the Son and by the Spirit and we do so with an unbelievable statement of gratitude that You are actually pleased and take pleasure in the

worship of Your people. That is our great delight. Grant us such leaders. Thank You for these men who have submitted themselves to Your call to Your church under Your command to accomplish Your mission with Your strategy as an act of worship to the praise of the God of glory and grace, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.