

Unity

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Preacher: Rev. Duncan Macaskill

[0 : 0 0] I'm sure that's the testimony of many, if not all of us here, that we have prayed that the sins and faults of our youth that the Lord would forget and that He would have mercy upon us.

And that's why we're here because we are God's people who have experienced His forgiveness and His mercy. And all the sins and misdemeanours of our youth and past life, God has wiped clean.

So we have a clear conscience before God and with one another. Our conscience troubles people of things they did, things that they did wrong and they can be haunted by it.

But as we believe in God's word, we believe that He forgives and in that rightful sense He forgives all the sins and misdemeanours. So we ought not ever to be under a burden of guilt or shame.

Shame for our past sins, but walk in the freedom and in the joy and the blessedness that Christ gives us. And in that way that He would want us as individual Christians and as the church to live.

[1 : 0 4] So now to the text, chapter Joshua. I'm going to do it under four headings. We'll begin with the first heading and I could maybe after this we'll put the four up and just put it in perspective if we could do that.

The first one is leaders need new strategies for a new day. I'll go through them. Cooperation brings success and victory.

People in the villages are being prepared and fourthly the scarlet card of the gospel. So we'll begin with the first point.

And as we see in the text here, a new day had come for the people of God, for Israel. For 40 years the pattern of their lives had been more or less the same day after day, year after year.

Sometimes they had gone round in circles. Other times they had been static stationery. Even at Mount Horab which was the holy place of revelation, they stayed there and stayed there for many, many months, even longer, until the day came when God said, Arise, break up it's time to move on.

[2 : 1 7] They've stayed long enough at the mountain. And you know we in church as Christians can build holy mountains and monuments and stay cleaving to them for years and years.

We can go round them, we can stay static nearby them. We've reached a position and we say this is a good place, I will stay here. And Mount Horab was a blessed place and for a time it was a glorious place.

But God had moved on and the people of God were still static. So there comes a time, a shaking, a word from the Lord, Arise. It's time to break out of the mold.

It's time to stop doing the same things month after month, year after year. And you know religious practices can become like that, our Christian life and the life of God's people here.

It can just become ritual, doing the same thing week after week, year after year. Never moving on, but we're waiting for the Lord to speak to us. It's time to move on.

[3 : 16] And when we do move on, there will be some who will readily embrace change, who will welcome change and they rejoice it's time to move on. Action at last, we've been longing for this, whether it's in church, for example here.

But there will be those who will resist change. They'll also say no, let's maintain the status quo. They may not articulate it like that, but it will come out. That's because we're all different, our natures are different.

None of us are the same. And so in a company of a congregation, there'll be that tension between those who are ready to embrace change and move on with the leader of Moses with Joshua and say yes, we'll go.

And there'll be those who'll hesitate and hold back and say, well, I'm not so sure that we should go. We've really been set well here for a long time and things like that. So there can be a clash within a church and between churches.

And in a sense, we're preaching to generally to the Carlyway church is here tonight. That's the context, not to anybody else. And so when that happens, when there is a clash of vision or of priorities within a church, I think we need to look at the bigger picture, look beyond what your priority is and your brother and sister's priority and see the bigger picture and say, what is God's plan for us?

[4 : 38] Because we only see in part each one of us to the very best. We only see a little part of God's plan. And so we need others, but we really need to take time to see a Lord to pray and to say, Lord, what is your plan for us as a church, as a people going on?

So important just to move according to God's word and not our own inclination. And the Israelites had listened to Moses teaching and his directives for many, many years.

They trusted him. They highly revered him. They respected his trustworthy words. They had seen him go up the mountain to meet God, meet God face to face and to receive the commandments.

They had seen him perform mighty miracles in their escape from Egypt and other miracles in the desert. So they saw that God was with this man.

And he was revered. And at the end of the last verse, it says that Moses, there had been never a prophet since in Israel like him whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to do.

[5 : 47] And for all mighty power and all great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of us. So he was greatly revered and rightly so.

But the day came when he passed on. His time as leader, as a great, great leader, the greatest leader of Israel came to an end. In one sense you could say that he fell short of fulfilling the promise that he and the people of Israel had been given that they would enter the land of promise, the land of Canaan.

But his ministry wasn't a failure, not at all, absolutely not. He was given the call from the burning bush when God spoke to him and gave him the mandate to go and bring deliverance to God's people.

And he fulfilled it. All the years that he served, he fulfilled that. So he fulfilled God's calling until the day that God spoke to him and said, from Mount Nebo, you're not going to enter into the land.

This is as far as you go. This is where your ministry comes to an end. It wasn't a judgment. It was simply that every leader throughout history has a season, has a time.

- [6 : 55] And that time is directed by God. It's not the will of man that a leadership stay or go. But when God directs, then we acknowledge that it's the hand of God to change the leadership.
- And so we have a new leader. And the transition from leadership was well received by the people, which is a blessing, which is a great blessing for God's people.
- And one leader moved on to the other. They recognize this man, Joshua, as a man that God had singled out. They could see right from the beginning that God chose this man.
- It wasn't done by a vote. It wasn't done by a show of expression, but that they could see that God had chosen this man. And so almost with one voice, they said, as we read, whatever you have commanded us to do, we will do.
- And wherever you go, we will go. And it's an amazing level of obedience and acknowledgement of a leader, a powerful and unanimous declaration of support.
- [8 : 00] And which leader wouldn't be thrilled to hear that all his people are with him. They're fully with him. And they're going to back him through because when leadership changes, new leaders, invariably some stage initiate change.
- So it's good to have everybody with you, supporting you in a transition, and you want to maintain that support throughout the times when the leader undertakes changes.
- You want that level of support that the congregation say, whatever you say, we will do, not an unblind support to the leader.
- And when changes in leadership take place in churches, they can be fraught times. Some of the people may say, as the Israelites did here, whatever you desire to do, we will follow.
- Yet there'll be those who cannot master that level of support and endorsement. And the challenge of the new leader is to try and take everybody on board.
- [8 : 59] If there's two camps or three camps within the whole camp of God, he will seek God's heart. How can he win all the people to come with him, if it is possible to bring everyone?
- Not that he's perfect. He'll have flaws and faults like every human being, but he will have his inspiring qualities that single him out to be clearly the man that God has called for the task.
- And as the Israelites interjected, they said, only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. They wanted to be sure that this new leader was in the same sense anointed of God as Moses was.
- And it's rightfully so to know that your leader is chosen by God and anointed to God. And Moses had said a wonderful phrase that you'll know of when he was dialoguing with the Lord.
- He said, Lord, unless your presence go with us, we will not go up. Moses realized that for him to be a victorious and successful leader, God had to be with him. He needed to have a sense of his presence.
- [10 : 13] And it's the same in the church. For us to be a successful, I'll say more about that, we need to know that God is with us by spirit. And so they saw that in Joshua.
- They saw the crucial factor that the Lord's spirit was at work with him. And we, you, need to see that in whoever leaves us in our church. We need to see that this is a man chosen by God, anointed by God for a task, for a new day.
- And we will follow him. We will follow him. And that's the most important criteria that we look for in a man, that we see the mark of the spirit of God, the hand of God upon him.
- A man who operates in the flesh or in the charisma of his own personality or his own human endeavor, we should not follow. Because that person will invariably lead us off the right path.

So discernment by God's people is so important to know the heart of a man. To see him as he is with his great giftings, his oratory, whatever, his charisma, but also to see his faults.

[11 : 20] And not to bring his faults to the forefront and say, well, he is A, B and C. No, we all have our faults. And of course, Jesus said, don't judge. As soon as you judge what he's got this, this and this, we're immediately judging ourselves.

So we understand with one another that we all have our faults and flaws, but we still love one another in the Lord. That's our calling to, that love covers a multitude of faults.

And some of us have maybe many faults. And so we look for you to show grace to us and to one another. And so when we do that, we live and walk in a great humility.

And our people at walking humility, God will bless. When we raise ourselves up in pride or arrogance, God will smite.

So a people walking humility is a great criteria for a church to be blessed. And then chapter three, we read of the crossing over the River Jordan and how the Lord demonstrated his power through Joshua.

[12 : 24] This needed to be done. The people needed to see. So this is what the Lord said to him, today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel so that they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.

So he empowered Joshua to perform a mighty miracle in crossing the flowing river, which at that season was in flood. So he called 12 men from the tribe to take a stone and to take the Ark of the Covenant and to proceed to the water's edge.

The text tells us as soon as they came to the edge, the waters parted. Doesn't this sound familiar? This is a replica in a sense, a replication of the great miracle that Moses had performed.

And so they saw, not yes, the Lord is with this man. He is now performing the same type of miracle that the great Moses did. And so that day, God's people were reassured.

This is our man and we will go in to the new day with him. So the new day came, a new leader raised up. Therefore there needed to be a new plan.

[13 : 30] A new plan required to take God's people into the next phase. The previous phase had been a long protracted 40 years, but now they were entering into a different phase. They were going to become a people of battle and war, something that they had not known in their lives.

They were going to enter into a land of foreigners, of ungodly pagans and people who performed dreadful occultic practices. And God was going to drive these people from the land, sanctify the land.

So they were to become a battle people. A huge change in their life. Maybe they had a very easy life put prior to that, but now there was a huge demand on them.

If they could take possession of it, it wasn't going to fall into their lap. They had to engage in battle against the enemies. And everyone was called to arms.

Verse 12, all your fighting men, get ready for battle, must cross over ahead of your fellow Israelites. There were no exemptions, apart from women and children and livestock.

[14 : 40] There was one tribe that had been promised an area of territory which was on the periphery, but God still called them, no, you still must go. You'll leave your wives, children there.

You must go into the land and support your brothers. And then once the land is taken, then you can come back to be with your families. It's a huge challenge when we think of it, families, husbands and families being separated.

But all for the greater cause. They're seeing the bigger picture. The bigger picture is not, I want to be at home with my wife and family comfortable with livestock. That's a small petty vision, which we would all probably embrace.

But God's bigger picture was, no, there's work for you to do, men. You have to go in, take possession of the land. And when you've done that, you can come home victorious and successful and live a blessed life with your wife and the children.

So there was a calling of everyone to pull together. All the tribes different in their practices, different in so many ways, but the calling was to unite as one body to accomplish the task, to overthrow their enemies.

[15 : 51] And this, I believe, is a picture of Christian unity. Christian unity. We're following one leader and Snotter Minister.

The minister is the under shepherd of the great shepherd of her soul, the overseer of the church, Jesus Christ. That's the bigger picture. The small picture is when we just see our own little vision here.

But the bigger picture is Christ is the head of all the church, of which you are a part, of which we are a part. And so when we're engaging in Christian work, we are mindful of who we're doing it to.

Yes, we listen to the directives of our pastor, our leader, our elders, but we're doing it with a with a mind and an eye to Christ, for it is him that we are serving.

He is the overall leader and we are his servants. We are his servants. All we seek to do is for the exultation of his name, for the promotion of the gospel, for the saving of souls, for the furtherance of God's kingdom.

[16 : 52] It's all related to God's work. And we are God's people, and so there's a need for us, whether it's as an individual congregation to unite around the vision.

The vision is the same for every church. It'll be differently expressed in different communities, whether we're rural in a town, in a major city. The way that we will work out the plans of God will be different, but at the heart of it proclaiming Christ.

That's our main function. Bringing sinners to repentance, bringing them into the church, teaching them the faith, building up the church, nurturing the people of God, being a prayerful people.

These are our shared goals as Christians. They shouldn't vary, and we should keep the priorities, the biblical priorities, to be our priorities in each congregation.

And when we do, we are engaging in a battle, because we are in a spiritual battle. We're not seeking to take over the territory, or perish the villages, but we are seeking to win those who are within the boundaries.

[18 : 01] This is the inheritance that we seek, the souls to be saved, the people in the parish, the people in the villages, and we're to reach them with a message of hope and salvation.

This is our goal. It must remain our highest goal when we forget that. And this is what happens. It's not that I'm lecturing us in the church. I've seen it over the years.

Church life follows cycles, and I've seen the cycle of life whereby we'll enter into a long season of complacency, where we really don't get out of our way to win the lost.

We never undertake mission, we never go out on the streets, we never witness to people. We just get on with church life, which is good. Sacraments, worship, these things are good.

But we can drift away from what we're called to be a people, in a sense, battling for the souls of humanity, for our neighbours. So where is that in our priority list these days?

[19 : 01] That ought to be, I believe the Lord would, it's clear as scripture that that has to be a priority. It's not the sole one, but that is one thing that we ought to be doing.

And cooperation, as it was between the tribes, is a key to success. Cooperation within a congregation, and also cooperation between two or three congregations.

We're seeking the will of God, we're seeking the kingdom of God, we're seeking to proclaim Christ together, and we're seeking victory and success.

How can that be measured? When we measure the number of people that our lives and our church affects and impacts for the Gospel, the number of people that are turned from darkness to light, it is evident in our prayerfulness for our community and for one another.

That's success, it's not success in material terms, but in spiritual terms. We quantify our success in spiritual terms, the fruit that we bear, and that is what we are seeking to do.

[20 : 14] Seeking to do as one congregation and as two at times working together, joining together for that great overriding purpose. And even the banner that was put up on the walls just last week is a symbol.

I don't know if you've taken time just to reflect on it, but to me, as I thought about it, it very much expresses a message that's on the heart of God.

It's on both walls, it extends to both of us. We are included in this, we have a shared vision, we have a shared prayerfulness for the community, and so that banner reflects our shared identity.

We do things differently, and there'll be things that we won't do together, but there'll be things that we will do together because our mind is on the bigger picture of the kingdom of God.

And we rejoice for one another. The banner itself, I believe, to try and encourage people to commit to church, as they're passing by, especially visitors, and I know you're going to have a special effort this coming Sunday with refreshments outside.

[21 : 24] That's really expressing the heartbeat of God, reaching out in every possible way to pass us by, even if it's just one or two that come in. I remember last year, I think it was at our communion service, the year before time passes by in this pandemic era, and the church was packed, and there were two ladies who passed on bikes, and they said, oh, let's go in there, and they parked their bikes and came in.

We managed to squeeze them into the very corner, and it was absolutely wonderful, just because there was someone outside invited them to come in. So I pray a success upon your aims next week to win people to come in, and it just shows you that your heart is for God, for the kingdom, and for the people to be blessed.

So as we see here, and in the next few chapters, the Sharni strategy was devised. They couldn't just live on the old ways we did things in the past, this was Joshua, Jerusalem Yudai, and the plan that they had was that they would send spies into this foreign land and test the ground to see an opening for them, an opening for God's people, and you will well know the account of Rahab.

Rahab was singled out, we don't know, doesn't say how she was identified, but maybe she made herself available. She had heard the rumour, the story said, there are people, a wild people, but God is with them, and everywhere they go they have victory.

So her heart was, she knew that they were coming to her city, and she said, well, I'm either with them or against them. And so to protect herself and her family, she made a pact with the two spies, you know, the story very well.

[23 : 10] And it worked. The spies made a promise on behalf of their family that when they came, not one of their family would be put to harm. And the sign by which they would know the right house would be the scarlet rope, would be hung down from the window.

The scarlet rope that they were going to escape from when the rumour spread that these two spies were in the city.

She was willing to be cooperative with God's people. She had a sense that God is with them, and there was a blessing for her.

And I believe that as we pray for our villages, there will be people that you know whose hearts and minds are being prepared. In your conversation, you know that they're tender towards the gospel.

You may have spoken to them many times over the years, and it's touched them. They're moved because you're interested in their well-being. You're not just trying to twist the arms to come to church. So in the same way that God had a strategy to find someone in this city who would be willing to welcome them in, it's possible that there's a strategy here that you'll know people who are willing to allow God's people to come to their house and to enter their hearts, which is where we want to reach into the deep places of their hearts.

[24 : 38] As we pray, I believe, and maybe the Lord will lead us to the houses in conversation to be on the alert for someone who would respond to come to church.

Because when they come to church, they'll hear the word of salvation. They'll know they'll be loved and treated well. And it's to break down that barrier. The wall is not the city wall of Rahab City, but there's barriers all around our villages.

People are protecting themselves. But we're an army of people who love the Lord and who love humanity. And we've come with the message of Christ's salvation and forgiveness.

So when the spies came, they saw the red cord. And it reminded the household that promises had been made. You will be saved.

You will be protected. Show the evidence that you are standing with us. And this is what we're looking for. We're looking for signs around our community.

[25 : 42] Is there somebody whose heart is showing a little tenderness, openness towards the church? Is there a hint of a red cord, openness in their life, in their conversation?

You can tell after a while if someone immediately opposes if they're interested. And if there is, that's someone to pray about and to begin to tug them. And the gospel is that red cord, the red cord of Christ's blood, the means of salvation and deliverance, not just physically but spiritually, of course.

Household salvation. As it was for Rahab, all her house were saved. Wouldn't it be wonderful here in Carlyway if a household of a family would be saved?

That's her goal. That's her prayer. And may God enable you and I and us together in whatever strategies He gives us. To be able to reach out and find these people.

But it's a new strategy, something that we haven't done. So maybe in the city, and maybe here, I know we've done door-to-door work around gospel sharing and invitations.

[26 : 50] We don't tend to do that very much here. I'm not sure why it's probably because we know our neighbours. We're just, it's not the practice, but maybe it's something that we could do. We need to make it personal.

We need to overcome our own shyness, timidity, fear of rejection. If I go to my neighbour, they're bound to say, you know, go away. We don't want you. But what if? You say, oh yes, I'd be interested to talk to you about the gospel.

So we need something new, whether it's that. But I leave that for us all to decide as the Lord leads us, what is our strategy as churches? And a new day, I believe, is upon us, the church in Carlyway.

New strategies may be required, it's not for me to say they are required, but they may be required for us to be successful in bearing fruit for the Lord. We can't just do the same things year after year, going round and round the same cycle of religious routine and practices.

We've got to break up and do something new, something that God would show us that will bear fruit. And we have to be like Joshua repeatedly, several times, be courageous, be bold, be courageous and do what the Lord tells you.

[28 : 02] And we need to be courageous as God's people do, just to come out of our timidity and fear, apprehension and do bold things for God. And when we do, not in our own flesh and arrogance, but as we are led to do.

I believe we will see victory, we'll see success, we'll see fruit, we'll see chairs, beautiful new seats when this is finished, filled with people who a year ago were sitting at home.

This is our motivation. Our lovely churches are not so lovely when they're empty, but they're beautiful when they're full, full of people, come to worship and to hear the Lord's word.

So I'm sure it's one of the most thrilling things that we can hear about as people coming to God. It gets us all very excited, motivated.

And we, I believe, have a very good level of cooperation between the two congregations, pioneered by courageous but gracious leaders in the past.

[29 : 04] And I was very pleased to have met your previous minister. I'd heard so much about him. And I could see within 10 minutes, we had a fellowship meal afterwards, a meeting in here, and I could see within minutes how he and his charisma, his personality, his persona had been such a motivating factor in flourishing, causing this church to flourish.

Not that we exalt them on, but you could see that he was a leader for his time and this church prospered. And now we have a different leader. Next door, we were in a different situation.

So we've come to a place whereby we are building on the foundations of courageous and gracious leaders in the past. It's been maintained in recent years. They laid a good foundation.

And the current leaders are men who respect each other. We do indeed. As I said, we share common goals and a common vision.

There'll be some things that we will do together and some things that we won't do together. But we will, as the Lord leads us, pray and see if there are new strategies for a new day.

[30 : 16] And that would be the most wonderful thing that could happen in our lives to see the cause of Christ flourish in Carlyway through all the villages and to see the church flourish.

So these are, I trust, helpful pointers that we may reflect on, that you may reflect on yourself. A new day for leaders to devise as the Lord leads us, not clever strategies, so remind me.

Lord, speak to us. How might we win the lost here? Show us the way. Show us the people here who are ready to open their hearts and come to church.

The churches here have come a long way. I've only been here four years. But even in these times, we've come a long way.

Having adjoined communion service last December was a major and wonderful breakthrough. I'm sure none of us, very few of us would have imagined such a thing could have taken place.

[31 : 16] Now it's done. And I'm going to tell you the story behind it. Yes, I think it just comes to me. Because it wasn't my clever idea, you know, I just wanted you to know that.

Although I suggested it to Thomas. It was a couple of years ago, I think maybe on my second last visit to Israel. And I went to this church in Jerusalem.

And it so happened that they were out in the park having their service that day. Because they've got a good, good weather and lovely stuff. So I met one of the folks and we went off to the park, found them, and we were broken up into different groupings.

And there was a Korean and Asian group because there's a huge number of orientals in Israel and they pray with such passion.

And there were the Hebrew speakers and there was the English speakers. So I got into one of the groups with the English speakers. And we were given little slips of paper, which was the topic of discussion. And it was unity in the body of Christ.

[32 : 13] What does it mean to you? And give us examples. So each person was asked to give some reflection. And I give mine. And I just give the background.

I come from where I come from. We have two churches next door to one another. So I shared my bit. And at the end of it, this man came up to me across an American guy.

And he said, have you ever thought of having communion together? Well, you know this. I knew this is the Lord. It was something that hit me just like, that is absolutely wonderful.

This is, this is the Lord speaking. This was a new strategy. And I had made up that thought. It would have been, oh, the Church of Scotland want to do, but it wasn't.

It was nothing to do with. It came from someone and I took that as a word from the Lord. And but it took, it took a year and a half to two years before it came to pass. I didn't force it.

[33 : 10] I just waited. And then when it seemed the right time, I presented it to Thomas. And was Thomas enthusiastic? Yes.

Thomas was very enthusiastic because he sees the bigger picture. He sees that we are coworkers together for Christ, working with the common. So these things, you know, we shouldn't take for granted having a joint communion free church of Church of Scotland.

It's a wonderful blessing. It's a witness. And who knows what it's done good that it's done throughout the island. And we pray that as the Lord leads us, we will do more and more good things.

We seek to have unity, but not to have uniformity. We seek to be a diverse, but not a divided people. So that together, we, like the Israelites, may enter into the land of our promise and fulfillment for Jesus' sake.

Let's pray. Almighty God our Father, we thank you for the power of your word.

[34 : 14] Thank you that you've spoken to people in all generations, in all millennia, for people have listened where they have drawn aside to hear God, God speaks and God directs.

Lord may we, your people here in Carnaby, be a listening people to what the Spirit is saying to the church at this time, that we would hear a voice if we were to go to the left or to the right, would say, this is the way, walk in it.

We pray that you'll give to the elders here and the elders next door the wisdom that we all need to lead your people.

It is a great and challenging task to lead God's people, to feel the burden of their safety and security, to be responsible for their well-being spiritually in other ways.

And we pray, Lord, to be gracious pastors and elderships caring for the needs of your people here. That our congregations will grow and flourish, prosper and be all that they can be in this day and generation.

[35 : 32] We pray for Thomas, the leader in this church and the elders. May you bond them together in a wonderful unity that is not out of consensus and not of approving the words of man, but it's a unity that has come from the Spirit of God.

How blessed it is when brothers serve God in a unity of heart. So grant that grace, Lord, to them here.

Grant a unity of prayerfulness for the congregation, to support, to pray for the leadership, the collective leadership that all will have confidence they know where they're taking this church.

Thank you for the unique worship and expression of faith here. We pray that you will water it and bless it and make it a precious blessing to many.

We thank you for the many who watch online even tonight, elderly and firm at home, unable to be here. We pray that you will remind them, Lord, that they are still your family, your beloved people and that their heart may be here.

[36 : 44] So we ask you to bless them. Bless our fellowship as we part. May we hold on to the word and be encouraged in our faith.

And may we see days of a great harvest here in Kauai, Kauravi and across our parish. May we ask it in Christ's name.

Amen.