



Reaching New Heights – The Stewardship of Commitment

- Some of you may be familiar with the ministry of J. Robertson McQuilkin
- for many years he was the president of Columbia Bible College in South Carolina...
- he was also a well known speaker and writer and had a very effective ministry throughout the United States...
- but then he very abruptly resigned his position at Columbia...
- in a letter to the constituents of the college, he explained his choice...

..My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at Columbia Bible College. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just 'discontent.' She is filled with fear—even terror—that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.

Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel 'in sickness and in health...till death do us part.' So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not *have to care for her, I get to!* It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.

- what a tremendous example of the power and beauty of making, and keeping commitments...
- yet, there is no question that we live in a culture that is very skittish about doing so...
 - companies don't **guarantee** their products any more; they'll sell you a maintenance contract for an extra fee...
 - what ever happened to – "we'll stand behind what we sell"..."satisfaction guaranteed"..."we'll put it in writing...and we'll keep our word..."
 - you don't hear much of that in the marketplace anymore...
 - in our culture, couples live together before marriage because one or both are unwilling to make a commitment..."we'll try this out for a while but if I find somebody I like better I'm gone"...what kind of relationship is that?...and when such persons say, "I love you"...what they really mean is..."I love me, and I want you, but I'll be the one who determines how long that's going to be..."
 - so it's not hard to make the case that we live in a culture that is more and more skittish about making commitments to anything...
- but friends, that should never be true of people in Christ's church...

- fundamentally, the Christian life is all about commitments... first, from the perspective of God Himself...
 - **John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**
- that is a promise...it is a commitment on the part of God to every person who chooses to become a follower of Christ...
 - **John 6:37 - All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**
 - **John 10:27-28 – My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.**
- we could multiply verses like that all day long, where the Bible demonstrates that in the salvation process, God unreservedly makes unconditional promises to those who come to Him in repentance and faith...
- however, that door swings both ways...in coming to Christ, you are making commitments to Him...
 - **Matthew 16:24-26 – Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.**
 - **Romans 10:9-10 – that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**
- it is easy to make the case that the Christian life is all about making commitments...and a story like that of J. Robertson McQuilkin shows how and why that can be such a beautiful thing...
- in essence, that’s what this lesson is all about...
 - it is based on a principle on Scripture where landowners would leave for a journey that would take them away for a long period of time...
 - and before they left, they would select a steward...a person who would manage the farm or the vineyard or the household in their absence...
 - it was a tremendous trust, and an important responsibility...
 - and then some day, the owner would return, and ask his stewards to give an account of what they had done with what was entrusted to them...
- that is exactly the situation that those of us who are followers of Christ find ourselves in today...the Master is not physically present...
- but during this month we encourage one another to consider all that Christ has entrusted to us...all of our gifts, all of our time, all of our opportunities, His Word, the gospel, the people around us, our minds, our speech...on and on and on...to think about all of that...
- and then to consider whether we are being faithful to the trust...
- and then we look ahead...to what greater stewardship would look like in the days ahead...
- and then we unapologetically encourage one another to make commitments about what we are going to do with all that God has entrusted to us in the days ahead...
 - unlike the world in which we live...we believe making commitments is a very good thing...
- ..
- I believe we can find such words in a story from the life of a man named Joshua...so would you please open your Bible to Joshua chapter 24?.....
- we’re talking this morning about **The Stewardship of Commitment...**

...

- now, Joshua 24 – here we find ourselves at the end of Joshua’s life...much have the Promised Land has been received by God’s people and distributed to the various tribes...
- but now their leader Joshua summons them together, and reviews their history, and focuses on their future, and calls them all to make...a commitment.

- read Joshua 24:14-28

- in the time we have left, let’s study these verses looking for **Three lessons about commitment from the farewell speech of one of God’s great leaders.**

I. Joshua was not Afraid to Make Commitments.

- what we’re reading here is the polar opposite of the culture in which we live...
- here’s a man who’s willing to stand up and tell you what he believes...
- who’s willing to sign his name on the dotted line...
- who’s willing to make a promise about what’s going to happen in the day ahead...and he was willing to do that...

A. For himself.

- “as for me”...
- it’s wasn’t a matter of taking a public opinion poll...
- it wasn’t...well, let’s see what everybody else is going to do...
- it wasn’t the nail that stands up straightest is most likely to be hammered down...
- none of that...it was –“here’s what I believe God wants me to do and I have no trouble saying it out loud...I have no trouble putting my name to that...and I don’t need to know what everybody else is going to do...for me, I am going to serve Jehovah...I going to serve the God of our fathers...I am going to serve the God of heaven...I will serve the Lord...

- now, how was he able to do that?...there are a lot of answers to that question...many more than our time this morning allows us to explore...but here’s one of the answers...
 - because He knew that is the way God had always related to His people...
 - in other words, in being willing to make a commitment, Joshua was simply being like His God...
 - The Bible is the story of God glorifying Himself by making redemptive promises to man...
 - even as early as the Garden of Eden...God looks at Adam and Eve after they had fallen into sin, and looks at His adversary the devil after he had rebelled from heaven and begun his murderous plan...
 - and God made a promise to all of them...and all of us...
 - **Genesis 3:15 – And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.**
 - Scripture later revealed that the seed of the woman was the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who allowed Himself to be bruised on the heel by dying on the cross for our sin but then crushed Satan’s head when he was miraculously raised from the dead...
 - the great love gift, the giving of which we are about to celebrate and proclaim at Christmas time, was proof that God has no problem making commitments to people, and He also is willing to keep those commitments, even if doing so requires the ultimate sacrifice...
 - we could literally spend the rest of the day seeing example after example of God choosing to relate to His people in that fashion...

- but the point is, when Joshua was willing to stand up and make a commitment before the entire nation of Israel, He was choosing to be just like His God...

- now, he also had no trouble doing that...

B. For his family.

- "As for me and my house..."
 - now you might say, well, did he go home and discuss that with his honey first?...
 - did he have a family meeting and ask the kids to vote?...
- what's the answer to that?...of course not...
- In our culture we have gotten so far away from the headship of the husband and the father that too often men are willing to lead and wives and children are unwilling to follow...
- there are a lot of things in the home that ought not to be up for debate...
 - and whether or not we're serving the Lord certainly fits in that category...

]

C. Because that's what leaders do.

- Joshua understood the principle that leaders lead.
 - you might "I am not a leader." You are to someone.
- .
- friend, essentially that's what I'm asking you --- will you stand up with a man like Joshua...will you say it...will you write it down...will you make a commitment worthy of the words...as for me and my house...in the coming year...count us in...we will serve the Lord...
- now, why was Joshua so intent on the importance of each one of them making a decision?...
 - why did he look them straight in the eye and say... **Joshua 24:15 - ...Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve...**

II. Joshua Understood that the Content of Your Commitment Reveals the Identity of Your God.

- When God chose the nation Israel, a significant part of their calling was to understand that there is only one God...
 - **Deuteronomy 6:4 - Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!**
 - **Exodus 20:3 - You shall have no other gods before Me.**
- and He had demonstrated to them over and over why and how He was worthy of that kind of singular devotion...
- and in a polytheistic culture in which they lived, that meant they were going to be significantly different than the people around them...and that was the point...their wholehearted devotion to God would help them be a light to the nations...
- and Joshua knew, if they would make a commitment to serve the Lord, and to serve the Lord alone, it would make it easier for them to continue to cultivate a dynamic personal relationship with him...
- that is why Deuteronomy 6 goes on to say... **Deuteronomy 6:5 - You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**
 - the principle is – the more singular your commitment, the more devoted your love.
 - **Jesus said it this way... Luke 12:34 - For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

- see friend, what are you really committed to?...what are you really passionate about?...
- we live in a modern day vanity fair where there are numerous idols clamoring for your attention...
 - and not all of them are intrinsically bad...but if they take your attention off the savior who loved you, and died for you...then you made the wrong choice...
 - what does the content of your commitment reveals about the identity of your God?

- as we've seen, ultimately Joshua was willing to turn the attention to those who were listening...

III. Joshua was also Not Afraid to Challenge Others to Make Commitments.

- sure he was taking a risk...that's true any time a leader opens his/her mouth...
- but it was the right thing to do...

A. In thankfulness for God's blessings in the past.

- we didn't take the time to read the earlier verses in chapter 23...but that's all about the way God had blessed them up until now...
- in light of that, how could they not choose to serve Him in the days ahead?

..

- a hesitancy to make commitments to Him in the days ahead would be nothing short of a slap in His face...choose you this day who you will serve, in thankfulness for His blessings in the past...

- now, something else that we need to add...

B. Understanding that the commitment process is also sometimes a winnowing process.

- Joshua said in verse 19 --- some of you are not going to be able to do it...
- he knew that some of them would not be willing to declare their allegiance...or certainly not with any real intent to follow through...
- and I realize that some may say – you know, – if you push this commitment thing too hard, some people may not like it...
- can I just be straight with you about that?...I believe that a supposed Christianity without a call to sacrificial commitment is a mockery to the Savior, and an embarrassment to the cause...
 - there is some fascinating research coming out of the church growth camps...
 - what some of the mega-churches are finding is that they invested millions of dollars into entertaining people instead of calling them to a serious and sacrificial commitment to Christ and while on the one hand they've attracted large crowds, the people coming are spiritually weak and not much different than the world in which they live...

- We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.

- Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church. That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he's asking us to transform this planet.

- I hope every person coming to our church takes up the call to make specific commitments to serve the Lord in the days ahead...if the process of suggesting such a notion causes some to not want to be part of such a church, then we'll leave that in the hand of God.

C. With a focus on the task God has for you now.

Joshua 24:28 - Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.