

10. Joshua the successor

February 2, 2012

"You are a bunch of liberals. Your faith in Jesus Christ is compromised by your carnal life. You should be ashamed of yourself in the way you honor the Lord," that is what John Knox, D. L. Moody, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and C.S. Lewis would say to us if they had a chance to see not just our congregation only, but also all the 21st Century Christians in general. Because they had lived much narrower and holier life for the Lord than all of us.

It has been said that every local church is only one generation away from its extinction. More and more denominations embrace carnal and ungodly things on the social landscape as something they think they must do. They no longer have the Christian standard that they honor. To them, just about everything is acceptable under the banner of God's grace and love.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, "Cheap grace is our church's deadly enemy. Costly grace is the Gospel which must be sought again and again. Such grace is costly because it costs one's life; it is grace because it cost God His Son's life. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His son to be too dear a price to pay for our life."

To be very honest with you, I am very concerned about our next generation – I am talking about 20-40 years old – in our congregation. I have not seen anyone whom I can trust to pass the pastoral torch to. At least not yet.

In tonight's study, Moses was preparing to pass his torch to his trusted servant Joshua in the presence of the Lord and the entire congregation of Israel. At the same time, we see other important lessons we can learn from the Lord.

A. THE SECOND CENSUS OF ISRAEL

Numbers 26:1-4 And it came to pass, after the plague, that the Lord spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: 2 "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel." 3 So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying: 4 "Take a census of the people from twenty years old and above, just as the Lord commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt."

By the time Israel had entered the Zared valley as it mentioned in this chapter, the old generation had died off, except for Moses, Caleb, and Joshua. And very soon, Moses would die. Israel was making a new beginning, thanks to the faithfulness and mercy of God. It was time to take a census of the new generation and start looking toward the future.

Actually, the transition between chapter 25 and 26 reminds us of the transition from chapter 14 to 15, because in both of them the Lord moved from judgment to mercy, from punishment to promise.

For the first census, the Lord wanted Moses to know how many men were available to fight, 20 years and older. But for the second census, the Lord wanted Moses to know how many people were in each tribe so that he could divide up the Promised Land so that they could claim their inheritance.

The Lord could have sent mighty angels to wipe out the Canaanites instantly, but He chose to work through human beings. Certainly our Lord is long-suffering toward His people and us.

Israel had not yet crossed the river and entered the Promised Land, and yet by faith Moses was already preparing for the tribes to claim their land. Though he wasn't allowed to go in himself, Moses invested the closing weeks of his life in preparing the new generation to enter Canaan and claim the land God promised to give them.

This reminds me of king David who wanted to build the temple for the Lord, but through prophet Nathan he was told that his son Solomon would since he shed too much blood according to 2 Samuel chapter 7. Though David was not allowed to build the temple for the Lord, he prepared all the building materials and funds for his son Solomon to build it for the Lord.

All of us have an obligation to prepare a good solid spiritual stepping stone for our next generation to build theirs as our previous generation faithfully did for us. I just hope that those who have been coming to our church would learn to acknowledge and obey the Word of God as their Absolute Truth and Final Authority throughout their lives.

For the rest of chapter 26, you pretty much see the result of the second census in numbers of each tribe. No wonder they call this Book as the Book of Numbers.

B. LET ME ASK THE LORD ABOUT THAT

Numbers 27:1-5 Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 2 And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: 3 "Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the Lord, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. 4 Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers." 5 So Moses brought their case before the Lord.

When these daughters came to Moses and he had no answer, he could answer with whatever that came to his mind. But Moses was sensitive to the Spirit of God enough to bring the situation to the Lord.

What a great example for us to follow! How often we assume that the Lord is with us and come up with our own decision and expect Him to bless it? When He doesn't, we get upset with the Lord for not blessing our decision. In other words, we treat Him as if He is obligated to do whatever we want.

It is always better for us to take time to pray to the Lord and wait upon Him for His answer before we make a decision than we run ahead of Him only to be corrected by Him for our wrong assumption.

C. GOD TELLS MOSES OF HIS COMING DEATH

Numbers 27:12-14 Now the Lord said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. 13 And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron

your brother was gathered. 14 For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.” (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)

Because Moses and Aaron had not honored the Lord at Meribah, they were not permitted to enter the Promised Land with the new generation. After he delivered the messages recorded in the whole Book of Deuteronomy, he was permitted to climb up Mount Nebo where he was able to view the Promised Land.

Centuries later, he and Elijah would stand in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration when they talked with Jesus about His impending death on the cross. By the Lord’s mercy, Moses finally made it to the Promised Land.

D. THE INAUGURATION OF THE SUCCESSOR

Numbers 27:15-23 Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: 16 “Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, 17 who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” 18 And the Lord said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. 20 And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. 21 He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him--all the congregation.” 22 So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. 23 And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

During the 40 years of ministry as the faithful shepherd of this obnoxiously difficult 2 million people congregation, how often he had to intercede for them before the Lord! Twice God had offered to destroy the Israelites and start a new nation with Moses, but he had refused. He had been misunderstood, criticized, and almost stoned, but he remained a faithful shepherd to his people.

From human perspective, Moses had every right to be bitter about not being allowed to go into the Promised Land and the impending death. But instead of dwelling in his bitterness, he was concerned about the successor and the Israelites’ future.

It certainly was no surprise that Joshua was the man God chose to take Moses’ place, because he had worked closely with Moses since they left Egypt:

- He led the Israel army to defeat the Amalekites
- He ministered as Moses’ servant
- He was with Moses when Moses received the Law from the Lord at Mount Sinai.
- He was one of the twelve spies and joined Caleb to encourage the people to enter the land.

But the most of all, Joshua had the heart for the Lord.

Exodus 33:11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

The most important thing in the qualification of a spiritual leader, especially a pastor of a church is not what he had accomplished from human perspective, such as a seminary degree or ordination, rather whether he was called by the Lord for that position or not.

Moses had received his call and commission in the loneliness of the Midianite wilderness, but Joshua was commissioned publicly by Moses and Eleazar the high priest. Moses laid his hand on his successor and bestowed on him the authority God had given him, and Eleazar would use the Urim and Thummin to help Joshua determine the will of God.

During his years of service with Moses, Joshua learned some valuable principles of spiritual life and service, principles that still apply to all of us today. When you read the Book of Joshua, you see that he was concerned for the glory of God and the welfare of the people, and that he was careful to obey the orders God gave him throughout his life.

The two times Joshua didn't seek God's will, he brought the nation into shameful defeat in Joshua chapter 7 by underestimating Ai while there was a sin in the camp; and in chapter 9 by making a treaty with the Gibeonites without the Lord's permission. But to his credit, he trusted God to make his mistakes work out successfully in the end.

Under Joshua's leadership, the nation worked together to defeat the pagan nations in Canaan and then establish the nation of Israel. Before he died, he called the leaders and the people together and led them in dedicating themselves and their families to the Lord, affirming to them:

Joshua 24:15c But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

One of the responsibilities of Christian leaders today is to see to it that the next generation is equipped to carry on the work. Unless we teach and train new leaders, we jeopardize the future of our homes, churches, and nation.

E. DAILY OFFERINGS

Numbers 28:3-6 And you shall say to them, 'This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the Lord: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. 4 The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, 5 and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. 6 It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord.'

Chapter 28 and 29 cover the sacrificial system which the Israelites had to observe in order to be right with the Lord.

Each morning and each evening, the priests were to offer a lamb as a burnt offering. The burnt offering typified total dedication to the Lord, and we should begin and end each day by giving ourselves completely to the Lord. The Christian life is a "continual burnt offering," except that we are living sacrifices not dead ones.

We should be like the psalmist who sought the Lord in the morning and evening:

Psalm 5:3 My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up.

Psalm 63:6 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.

We need to seek the Lord and make ourselves as living sacrifices daily, not just once in a while, because we defile ourselves due to our sinful nature daily. Continuous sanctification through the Word of God results in holy living.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) It is always better for us to take time to pray to the Lord and wait upon Him for His answer before we make a decision than we run ahead of Him only to be corrected by Him for our wrong assumption.
- 2) One of the responsibilities of Christian leaders today is to see to it that the next generation is equipped to carry on the work. Unless we teach and train new leaders, we jeopardize the future of our homes, churches, and nation.
- 3) Continuous sanctification through the Word of God results in holy living.