

THE REV. MATT KENNEDY AT THE INSTALLATION OF THE REV. IFE OJETAYO

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 July 2021

Preacher: Matt Kennedy

[0:00] Let's pray. Father, we ask you to open our hearts and minds to hear and receive your word.

I pray that you help me as I preach it, that I might do so rightly and truly. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Seated. I remember as a kid in Sunday school learning about Noah and Abraham, Moses and Joshua and all the rest.

Can't remember all the lessons. I'm sure I miss details. But what I do remember, maybe you have the same memory, went something like this.

Noah was a man of long obedience. Be like Noah. Abraham went where God told him to go. Be like Abraham.

Moses was the most humble man ever. Moses tells us so himself in Numbers 12, verse 3. Be like Moses. Joshua was a great leader.

[1:23] Be like Joshua. When it came to Jesus, the pattern followed. Be like Jesus. Now, there's nothing wrong with that kind of teaching as far as it goes.

But that's as far as it went. And that left me with the impression that being a Christian means being good like Jesus, obedient like Noah, willing like Abraham, humble like Moses, and strong and courageous like Joshua.

So, as I grew older, I realized I'm not able to do any of those things. So I gave it all up for a while. Not understanding that with that realization that I'm not all of those things. I had come to the River Jordan, but had not crossed.

Receiving the gospel begins with that truth that you cannot satisfy the requirements of God's law. That's why God has taken on flesh and bound himself to you in Christ and accomplished it all.

[2:44] Your salvation, your peace with God, your rest. He's accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. The book of Joshua, and that's what we'll be looking at today.

The book of Joshua is not about what Joshua did. It's not the book of the amazing Joshua and his wondrous exploits. The book of Joshua is about what Christ did through Joshua.

You see this very early on in the book. Joshua is the commander of the army. But on the eve of his first battle for Jericho, we're told in chapter 5 of Joshua that Joshua lifted up his eyes, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand.

Joshua said to him, Are you for us or for our adversaries? He said, No. I am the commander of the army of the Lord.

Now I've come. Now if I were in Joshua's place, I would have looked around. I thought I was the commander of the army of the Lord. What are you? But Joshua understood to whom he spoke, and so he fell on his face, we're told, and worshipped him.

[4:00] It's important. And said, What does my Lord say to his servant? The commander of the Lord's army said, Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you're standing is holy ground.

When in scripture, humans worship angels, the angels rebuke them. This is no angel. When Jesus returns in Revelation chapter 19, we're told that he will come on a white horse, leading the hosts of heaven.

Christ is the commander of the army of the Lord. Joshua meets Christ pre-incarnate, God the Son. Christ stops the waters of the Jordan. He tears down the walls of Jericho. He puts the Canaanites to flight. Joshua's victories belong to the Lord.

But Joshua shares in them. Because what he does, and what he says in the event that I just read to you, falling on his face, and worshipping, and saying, What does my Lord say to his servant?

[5:18] Was the pattern of his life. Doing that is the substance of God's commandment to Joshua in the text we read.

Verses 7 through 9, chapter 1. Let's turn there. If you don't already have it open, please go ahead and turn there. The commands God issues in verses 7 through 9 are predicated on God's promises summarized in verses 5 through 6.

And reiterated in verse 9. I'll read 5 and 6 to you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous. For you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

There'll never be a time, Joshua, God is saying, when you call on me, and I won't be there. I'll always be there. Joshua may feel forsaken, but that feeling will never be true.

On that basis, be strong and courageous. For, or because, I'll give Israel what I swore to give Israel through you.

[6:31] Now, God makes these promises specifically to Joshua. But the author of Hebrews applies one of them to every believer.

Keep your life free from the love of money. This is chapter 13, verse 5 of Hebrews. Be content with what you have, for God said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

I've been a pastor for 20 years. There are times when that feels untrue. Families move away, or worse, start attending another church.

People become angry about decisions you've made. You feel embattled. Everything you do seems to turn out badly. You work hard, but only thorns come up from the ground.

Let this promise sink in. Memorize it. Claim to it. I will not leave you or forsake you.

[7:47] Whatever trouble crashes around your shoulders is not because God has stepped away. He'll not leave you. He's not thrown up his hands and said, well, Ipe, I've just had enough of him.

I will not forsake you, he says. But you might say, looking at those promises I just read, that God also promised Joshua success, that he would give Israel the land that he promised to Abraham, that he'd do that through Joshua.

And Ipe might say, looking at that text, there's no such promise for me. God doesn't promise that I'll lead a large congregation or that we will convert all of Syracuse or that people won't leave.

He doesn't promise those things. But he has, and he's doing it today, he has appointed you to be the pastor of his people. He's appointed you to preach the word.

And so far as what you preach is the word, he promised that it will never return empty. That he'll use it to teach, to reprove, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[9:07] That's why Paul in the very next chapter charges Timothy, preached the word. By it, God promises to bring his people to their Sabbath rest, who is Christ.

You have that promise. And Christ has appointed you also to administer his sacraments, by which he promises to wash and feed his flock.

God does not promise that you will convert Syracuse, try anyway, but he does promise, but he does promise that his word will accomplish that for which he gave it.

Only be strong, verse 7 says, and very courageous. Being careful to do according to the law, to do all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you.

Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left. Think about it. Joshua's very first step was fraught with peril. The Jordan River was at flood stage.

[10:14] The fords were deep underwater, and so Joshua has to tell his people, yes, the river is flooded. Yeah, I know many of you have babies, but we're going to cross that river.

And God says that we're crossing on dry ground. The strength and courage with which Joshua must act many of the times is not primarily on the battlefield, but in the heart and the mind and the tongue.

God attaches his strength and courage to his word. When the law requires that Israel do what Israel does not want to do, Joshua must not be swayed.

It's very easy as a pastor to confuse affection with love. You can have so much affection for your people and they for you that the thought of causing displeasure, of creating a rift, seems harsh.

Considering the readings for the coming week, noting that one of the passages directly confronts a deeply embedded behavior in your congregation, you preach on something else.

[11:45] Or knowing a member of your congregation with influence and power is misusing it, you decide it'll work itself out. This preserves the bond of affection, but it's not love.

You should know that Ife served with us 10 years. Ife served Good Shepherd with strength and courage. Ife is a gentle and kind man.

I know if you know him, you know that. But he knows how to gently and kindly drive the two-edged sword of the word right into your heart. Faced with difficult counseling situations, I was frequently tempted to say, why don't you have a talk with Eevee?

Nevertheless, by way of warning, the longer you're a pastor, the more difficult this becomes. In the first place, you're tired and you want peace, even if it's not real peace.

And secondly, your affection for your people grows. It's easy to tell a man you've known for six months to repent and go back to his wife. Telling the friend you've loved for ten years who has stood by you through thick and thin that he cannot have communion because he refuses to reconcile with his wife, that will break your heart.

[13:23] But you have to do it. As a pastor, loving your friends sometimes means losing them. But it's the only way.

You'll notice that, you'll notice that this is a two-edged passage. God addresses Joshua's task of leading, but there's also a personal edge to it.

Moses, whom Joshua served before, went to his death because he was not careful to do all that God commanded. There is a connection between life and doctrine, between your preaching and your living.

I'll come to that in a minute. Be careful, God says, do all that Moses commanded so that you may have good success wherever you go. Success, that sounds good. Success is a loaded word.

For context, helps. God is not saying, Joshua, if you want to be wealthy, obey me. Joshua, if you want to be important, obey me. He's saying, the task I've given you is so great that it can only be accomplished by me.

[14:31] so abide in my word and abide in me. I've already mentioned ways that people measure ministry success, numbers, are you growing, influence, are people downloading your sermons, power, will you get to wear a big hat?

He's not wearing his hat today, though, so. Or we get to be called the very reverend, Ife Ojetayo. Seeking true success down those paths is to turn to the right or to the left.

The task God has given you is to diligently study, uphold, and preach his word, shepherd his people, administer his sacraments. doing these day by day is your success.

In these, Christ does tear down strongholds, he softens hearts, he heals corruption, he comforts the afflicted in accordance with his will, not your will, or mine.

What he does with his word is his business. You may gain a hundred people, you may lose some who are here today. That has no bearing on your success.

[15:59] You preach the word, administer the sacraments. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, verse 8, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

Moses, raised in Pharaoh's court, wasn't illiterate. He wrote down what God revealed and most have taught it, or imagine he may have taught Joshua how to read it. Joshua must not let the book of the law depart from his mouth.

You might wonder when you read that, why not the eye or why not the ear? Well, ancient people didn't usually read silently, even when reading to themselves. If you visit Jerusalem and you go to the waving wall, you'll see Orthodox Jews rocking back and forth and reciting the law out loud to themselves, meditating on it.

I'm told, I'm not wonderful at Hebrew, but I'm told the word for meditate comes from the word for chewing cud.

A cow chews cud, swallows it, regurgitates it, chews more, swallows it, the process keeps going. Meditate on the word.

[17:10] This isn't just a book. It's one means by which you are drawn up into Christ, by which Christ imparts himself and joins himself to you.

The Bible, the scriptures, are not a sacrament, but it is sacramental. You participate in Christ.

You open your Bible not just to glean information, but to commune with your Lord. I have no doubt that you will study for sermons and Bible studies, but you can become so pressed for time, so harried, so weighed down that you say, I don't have time to read this for myself.

I can read it for my congregation, not for myself. You set it aside for a day, and then two, and then three. Then it becomes habitual to study for your job.

When that happens, everything else begins to chafe and decay. The time you thought you would find, you will not find.

[18:21] Satan loves nothing more than to keep priests from meditating on the scriptures, so he can fill your ears with other words. In almost every case I know, and this is anecdotal, almost every case I know when a pastor falls into disqualifying sin.

The first thing to go is this. The Bible at first seems a burden, seems tedious, and then when you're already living a life other than the one you preach, it's torturous.

So you keep it at a distance. But if you keep it close, you draw close to him. And of course, you will not do according to all that is written in it, neither did Joshua.

You're a saint and a sinner. Being a pastor doesn't change that. The isolation and the spiritual strain bring temptations that surpass what you have known up to this point.

But the law, in the end, reveals that you cannot follow the law, and directs your heart to Jesus who saves you from your body of death.

[19:42] So be diligent in your study. Not just once, but every day. Confess to him, Christ, cling to him, and rest in him.

For then you'll make your way prosperous and you'll have good success. The word for prosperous, I'm told, doesn't mean material prosperity, but wisdom, prudence. meditate on it, on the law, day and night, for then you'll be wise and successful accomplishing the task to which God's appointed you.

You will not succeed in some other thing, but in the task to which God has appointed you. This is important, not just for you to know, ethe. Some congregations, and I don't know about Holy Trinity, so don't take this personally, I don't know you.

Some congregations measure their pastor's success practically. How much money are we bringing in?

Young families, where are the young families? As for bringing in families, young or old or individuals, I believe that's your task.

[20:53] His task is primarily to shepherd the flock. You go out into the world and bring them in. Assessing life's success, don't ask, are we growing numerically?

Are we growing financially? Is he changing something that I really like? Or not changing something that I've demanded that he change? Does Lisa wear her hair according to my likes?

You laugh. That happens. he shouldn't spend so much time studying when there's this other thing that he needs to be doing. He looked at me funny.

There's a Baptist congregation down the street from our church. Ten years, they've been through six pastors. Over lunch, one of them told me that the deacon board had a secret emergency meeting because he proposed moving the service forward 30 minutes to make time for Sunday school.

This is a church that's dwindled from 200 to 20. They don't want Sunday school or to be inconvenienced. Don't be that church.

[22:15] You're not waiting to see whether or not God has called life to be your pastor, whether he'll pass your test or meet your expectations. Today, God appoints life to be your pastor.

Unless he teaches contrary to the scriptures or commits some disqualifying sin, assume that Christ is ministering to you through him.

The author of Hebrews says as much, obey your leaders and submit to them for their keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not groaning for that would be of no advantage to you.

You're a great congregation. You guys have helped us down at Good Shepherd over the years, been supportive of our church and our family, so I'm sure you know all of this. I have no doubt that Ipe and Lisa and their boys will live among you with joy and not groaning.

But I decided to pass on that warning. God finally asks, have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous, do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you

wherever you go.

[23:30] It's a rhetorical question. Yes, he has so commanded. There is therefore no need to be dismayed on the bank of the Jordan, or before the walls of Jericho, or even after the defeat at Ai.

the Lord your God. Notice all the caps, capital letters in that. Yahweh, God's covenant name, God's personal name, is with you wherever you go.

There's a reason for that, that Joshua in his day could not have fully grasped. Joshua, as I'm sure many of you know, is Yeshua, which means God delivers or saves.

Gabriel told Joseph to give Mary son, that same name, which we pronounce as Jesus. Joshua is a type, he's a picture of the captain, the commander that he met, the Joshua to come.

Ultimately, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the priests, the kings, the elders of Israel, none were able to do all the things in accordance with the law of God.

[24:40] We all, in one way or another, turn to the right, or to the left. No one is righteous, not even one. I'm a sinner. He pays a sinner.

I think even Bishop Dobbs is a sinner. But what we cannot do in ourselves, Jesus has done. Born of the Virgin Mary, he began his conquest in the wilderness at the River Jordan, and he was careful to do everything in accordance with the book of the law.

And then, in obedience to his father, he stretched out his arms, taking the fullness of Joshua's sins, and yours, and Ephes, and mines, and the bishops, onto himself, and he died.

And he rose again, so that everyone who believes in him will never die. And all who believe will inherit all that God has promised. That's the gospel.

That is the gospel. It's not that God gives us great examples to follow, though he does, but that God has lived and died and rose again for us in Jesus. May that good news, Ethan, be ever in your mouth.

[25:51] May that ever echo from this pulpit. And may that ever be carried out these doors. Amen. Amen. For the induction hymn.