

The Advantage of Joyful Leaders

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: 02 May 2010

Preacher: Jonathan Smith

- [0 : 0 0] All right, well, as you just heard in that short reading, we're going to be talking about church leadership and being submissive to church leaders.
- And really, if you had have grown up with me, you might be sitting there thinking, why is Jono Smith talking about being submissive to leadership?
- It's not been a strong point of mine over the years, particularly in my younger years. I had a real kind of problem with authority figures, not so much my parents, but more to do with teachers and church leaders.
- And so I can remember very early on, even with my swimming teacher, I used to do swimming kind of very regularly throughout the week.
- And one time my swim teacher criticized me particularly harshly and for the way that I was diving. And so then when he showed me the way that he wanted me to dive, he was fully dressed at the time, but just the kind of action, I just launched him in.
- [1 : 0 6] And this was like, this was 92 and he had a mobile phone. So in 92, mobile phones were running at about \$300,000 each. And they came with a backpack with a battery in it.
- Not really, but it was pretty, pretty hardcore. And of course, you didn't think that people would have phones on them that weren't attached to cords. So I didn't know, but I ruined his phone and he called me a lot of words that I can still remember to this day.
- And he actually dragged me outside the pool and made me stand there in the cold until the lesson was over. Anyway, that's one example. I think another time, I think it was year 11, I should have been almost an adult and I didn't like the way that the history teacher taught our class.
- So I locked her out and proceeded to teach the class from her notes. She didn't get the principle for a good 20 minutes. So I got a good way through the lesson, but then they finally came and I got in a whole lot of trouble.
- So just to give you a couple of examples, that's the way I was. And you might be thinking, why on earth are you preaching to us then? What can you teach us about submission? I mean, what's next?
- [2 : 1 7] Are we going to get Tiger Woods to preach on marital fidelity? Too soon? We're going to get Lady Gaga to preach on modesty.
- Is that what's next? Well, the reason that I feel confident to stand here and preach, apart from the fact that this is really God's word and it's just my job to teach about it, is really that over the years of looking at the Bible, I've come to see that God actually has a really high view of leadership.
- And quite contrary to our culture, in particular in Australia, the Bible sees leadership as being something very important, that God appoints leaders to churches and, as we'll see, actually thinks so highly of their roles that they will be more harshly judged.

They'll be held accountable for the way that they lead. He also sees people in the church like you and me as people who are commanded to submit to leaders and obey them and pray for them and love them and make their job a joy and not something terrible that they need to endure.

So that's where we're at tonight. And the reason I've chosen this passage just as a one-off passage is obviously that Andrew is coming on Tuesday night and I thought it would be a good foray into sort of us examining ourselves before he comes and just making sure that our attitude to leaders is a godly and biblical one.

[3 : 43] So just before I pray for us, I might just give you a little bit of background to this letter to the Hebrews. We don't know who the writer of Hebrews was. We can take a guess, but we're really not sure. What's clear is that he was a pastor, teacher, elder of a church and at this point when he's writing particularly this last part of the letter, he's separated from his church.

You'll see that he's asking them to pray for him so that he might be restored to them. He might rejoin them. He's obviously a leader in the early church and he's not sure that he will be restored to them so he's giving them some advice on how they should live, whether he's restored to them or not.

Giving them advice and commandments on how to treat the local leaders of the church in his absence. So there's a lot for us to learn here tonight. It won't be a long sermon. I've just got a few points, but we'll walk through it together.

So make sure it's open, but I'll pray for us and then we'll get into it. Let's pray. Lord, please speak to our hearts tonight through this word and make us ready to welcome Andrew.

Please make us a church who loves its leaders and obeys its leaders joyfully. Please help us to make Andrew's experience here as the pastor of our church a real, a joyful one.

[5 : 03] And I pray that in response to the faithfulness of these people here tonight, you would make them more and more like Jesus as they obey their leaders. For Jesus' sake, I pray.

Amen. So let's do it. It's verse 17 we're starting at. And he just starts up by saying that, by telling his people, obey your leaders and submit to them.

For they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy, not with sighing, for that would be harmful to you. So for someone like me with my kind of background, even though I've, you know, God's really been working through me to have more respect for leaders.

There's two very terrifying words there in that first little passage, and that is obey and submit. Obey and submit. You might say, what do those words mean in the original Greek?

Obey and submit. That's what they mean. I think in Australia, in our culture, in our generation, we're really kind of behind the eight ball when it comes to obedience and submission to leaders.

[6 : 11] We've got a culture that's very egalitarian, very kind of flat hierarchical structure. That's the way we like it. That's to do with a lot of factors, partially going back to our heritage as kind of a convict nation.

We really weren't great at submitting to leaders from the start and mixing in a bit of socialism into our culture. We very much have embraced this egalitarian way of life.

And that can express itself in some good ways in terms of, you know, we have a high view of giving everyone a fair go and everyone a second chance, and we've got great safety nets for people so that if they're not doing so well, they'll be taken care of, that kind of thing.

But also, I think it encourages us to not have a biblical view of leadership hierarchy in general, and then in the church in particular. So you get a lot of churches being started these days that have flat hierarchical structures.

Anyone can be a leader. You just need to stand up and say something. There's no pastors, elders, teachers, that kind of thing. You might have been in a small group at some stage before where the members were kind of saying, why do we need a leader?

[7 : 19] Let's just all be leaders. They always fail. You wouldn't have been in that group too long because God has instituted biblical hierarchy and leadership for the people of God.

That's how things work. That's how he's ordained them to work. So what do these leaders do? You see in that first verse, verse 17, they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.

So this is the word here is the same as in the Old Testament when the word is being used of a watchman, like a sentry. So you would have the walled city and someone would stand out on the wall and keep watch so that in case enemies came or any threats would come against the city, that would be the job of the watchman to stay up all night long and they'd do it in shifts.

It's a bit like maybe a lighthouse keeper that needs to stay awake lest the ships crash against the shore. Similar idea with a shepherd watching over the sheep at night, guarding against wolves, that kind of thing.

That's the role of the pastor, of the elder in the church, that they would be watchmen and that they would watch over the souls of the people in the church.

[8 : 35] So the major role or one of the major roles that a leader in the church has is to keep watch over the souls of everyone under their care.

But the Bible employs this imagery of shepherds and sheep and that's very much what it's like with a pastor and your soul, that he has to take watch, take care of your soul in the same way that a shepherd would take care of a sheep.

That our souls are vulnerable to attack, that they don't always make the right decisions and so we need leaders to be watching over those souls. Now you realise in a church of this size that's a really hard thing to do and so Hebrews, I think it's 10.25, also talks about the responsibility of all the people in the church, that is all of us here, to keep watch over each other and spur one another on to faith and good deeds.

So there is the hierarchy there, there is the official leader whose job it is to oversee your soul but also it's the responsibility of everyone here that we keep each other accountable to living as Christ would have us live lest we give up the faith.

And that's what really the book of Hebrews is all about, is a warning against walking away from the faith. And so God has instituted leaders and also the priesthood of all believers, that's you guys, to watch over each other's souls.

[9 : 57] This is where our small groups, community groups come in. We have a network of small groups and the young adults, community groups, essentially the same thing, networks of smaller groups whose job it is apart from to learn the Bible and to pray for one another is just to keep watch over each other, keep each other accountable, make sure that no one walks away from faith as a result of not being taken care of.

And then sort of as a spur to the elders, to the leaders, to make sure they do a good job of watching over the sheep, the souls of the people who they're overseeing.

You see there that they will give an account to God for how they've done that job. So this is, if you're ever going to find yourself in a position of being an elder or a pastor in a church, this is terrifying.

To think that the kind of job I do in this church, I will give an account for how I've done that job is a terrifying thing. To stand before God and say, this is what I did, this is what I didn't do, this is the picture that the Bible gives us.

This is the biblical truth that your elders, that your pastors will be judged for how they have overseen you. James chapter 3, I think it's verse 1, says that you shouldn't necessarily want to teach in a church.

[11 : 25] You shouldn't necessarily want to be an elder in a church because you will be more harshly judged for having that position. And here it is again. They're keeping watch over your souls and will give an account for how they did that.

I think it's verse 7 in chapter 13. Let's have a look. Also talks about leaders. Yeah, verse 7, if you back up a little bit. He says, Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

So this is where it's so important that as elders, as pastors, as your leaders, we need to keep our life in check.

It's not just important what we say from the pulpit, but in what we say by the way that we live is really important as well. Because the command here is that you imitate your leaders.

And the truth here is that we will give an account not just for what we say, but also for what we do in this role. So it's heavy, heavy stuff.

[12 : 33] There's massive implications for how your leaders execute their leadership, and you should keep them accountable to how they're doing it. If you see me doing something that's out of step with my role as an elder, same with Wayne, same with Andrew, same with anyone here who's a pastor, you ought to keep us accountable to the way that we ought to be living, because we would rather you tell us in this life than have to face that kind of judgment in the next.

Let's just look at the second half of that verse. He says, I love this verse.

Anyone who's ever been an elder or a leader in a church loves this verse, because really what it's saying to you guys is that you need to make our life awesome. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning.

Why? Because it would be harmful to you. It would be of no benefit to you, another translation says. How does this work? Well, you can imagine if I'm an elder in a church, for example, just hypothetically, and I'm having a really bad time of it, that the people in the church are really making my life living hell, always quarrelling, always being critical, and never listening, and never being obedient, then how will this be harmful to you?

Well, I'm not going to be on my game. I'm not going to be overseeing your souls to the best of my ability. I'm going to be so downtrodden, so downcast, and so sick of my job, my calling, if you will, that I won't be overseeing your souls as well as I could be.

[14 : 25] So that's the equation here. He's saying, let them do it with joy, not just so that they're happy, but so that your souls will be overseen the best way possible. It will be harmful to you if you make a pastor's job harder than it ought to be.

So with Andrew coming in, this is going to be really, really important because, you know what, he's going to come in and he's going to do things differently. Many of you have never had a pastor other than Paul.

And Andrew's going to come in and the reason we chose Andrew in part, or the committee chose him, is because he is, as far as theology goes, he's on the same page as Paul.

So he ticks the boxes there in terms of what he believes about the Bible, about Jesus, about the atonement. He's big on preaching. So all of those boxes are ticked in the same way that they were with Paul.

But his style is going to be different. Just the way he interacts with you is going to be different. The way he runs things here is going to be different. And we have in church leadership and ecclesiology or church, our understanding of church, we have this picture.

[15 : 32] It might be helpful for you to think about two hands. And in the one hand, we have the non-negotiables. That's in the closed hand. So you've got things like the atonement, things like the exclusivity of Jesus, the place of the Bible as authority in our lives, those kind of things that we're never going to change.

You'll, as far as I can see into the future, unless something goes terribly wrong, you'll never have a pastor here who doesn't hold those things in the closed hand. Then in the open hand, there are things like style of music, just ways of structuring stuff, little things like how things look around the church.

They're all secondary open hand issues. And as different pastors come and go, those things are going to change. So that in mind, particularly if you've been here for a long time, the best way for you to save Andrew from groaning and sighing and therefore really dropping the ball in overseeing your souls, the best way for that to not be the case is for you to embrace the way that he does things, even when you disagree with him.

That's what obedience and submission is about, isn't it? There's no submission until there's disagreement, really. There's no call for you to forsake your own agenda until there's disagreement there.

So if he comes in and he does things differently and you don't like it, I encourage you, save him from sighing, save him from groaning, make sure that you're overseeing to the best of his ability and just go with it.

[17 : 12] It'll be fun. It will be. Let's keep going. He says in verse 18, pray for us.

We are sure that we have a clear conscience desiring to act honorably in all things. This is a really general point, but obviously we want you to be praying for Andrew and for your leaders.

This guy's asked his church to pray for him. And so I want to ask you, are you praying for Andrew? Are you praying for your leaders? I know that we prayed every week that prayer for the new vicar, that we would have a pastor after God's own heart, etc.

But are you doing it in your own prayer time? You should be so concerned that Andrew's doing a good job in overseeing your souls that you're praying for him.

That just flows out of you naturally, that desire for him to do a good job. And same with the other leaders here. I know that we pray a lot for the preaching in the church.

[18 : 17] If you come before the service and pray with us, which you're welcome to do at 5.30 every Sunday, there's a lot of prayers for the teaching and that's right. That's good. But you should be praying for other things like character things, like that we, as your leaders, would be kept holy and pure in our marriages and so on.

The way that we deal with our money and other areas. You need to pray for your leaders. We need to be praying for Andrew regularly as he comes in and takes over this church.

Then he goes on, we are sure that we have a clear conscience desiring to act honourably in all things. Here it comes back again to those character traits of the leader. So I think quite often in our church, we think about leaders in terms of how well they teach.

And I keep hitting this point and I know it's important. I know it's really primary. That's probably the biggest job of the pastor is to teach well. But in addition to that, there's got to be a life lived honourably.

I was talking to Andrew yesterday actually and I said to him, what's your kind of thinking about new leadership? Do you think that character trumps competency?

[19 : 31] And by that I meant, do you think a guy needs to just be a really godly guy and then you can teach him stuff down the track? And he said, no, I think you need to have both. But I think that you can have all the competency in the world and it will come to nothing if you don't have the character.

And that's the truth. You can be the best preacher, the best leader. You can organise people better than anyone else in the world. But unless you're a godly person, unless your heart is with Jesus in this ministry, then you're going to fail.

And you see pastors cheating on their wives. You see pastors doing dodgy things with the money all the time. So pray for your pastors that they would have a clear conscience, that they would act, not only desire, but act honourably in all things.

And he goes on to say, I urge you all the more to do this, that is to pray so that I might be restored to you very soon. You get a little insight there into his situation, that he's been separated from the church that he loves and he wants them to pray that he would be able to be reconnected with them.

He doesn't know if he will be. He may be killed or something might happen where he can't be reconnected, but that's his desire and so he urges them to pray about it. I just want to finish now just by, at the same time, just communicating to you how much I'm looking forward to Andrew coming.

[20 : 59] And just really, in saying that, I want to honour Wayne as well because he's done a phenomenal job taking over the church, kind of a three-legged beast for the last six months as we've been a man down and all that that brings with it.

And he has not shied away from the task, quite the opposite and done an honourable job. So I'm not, in saying I'm looking forward to Andrew, I'm not saying, you know, finally you get a picture.

Yeah. But man, I'm so looking forward to it. I've got to tell you, all that six months that we were praying week by week in here for a godly pastor, I had Andrew in my mind.

Every time. He was my number one pick. I don't know if I had another one. I think he's going to be brilliant. And we ought to be praying that God would use him powerfully. But Andrew Reid isn't Jesus.

Neither am I. Neither is Wayne. Neither is any of your pastors here. As you know well, we have many flaws. And so I think I just want to use this last kind of benediction that the writer to the Hebrews uses, writes here, just to remind us who it is that we worship here, who it is that keeps us together, ultimately who it is that teaches and perseveres us in faith.

[22 : 21] So it's a beautiful piece. We'll just read through it to the end. He says, So first of all, we need to know that Jesus, Jesus is our saviour, not Andrew Reid.

See that? Verse 20. Now may the God of peace who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that it's Jesus who was brought from death to life for our salvation, that it was Jesus who died on the cross, and thereby substituted himself for us, so that we don't have to die on a cross or in any other eternal way, but we can be reconnected with God for eternity, that our sins have been washed clean when we put our trust in Jesus, that he's our saviour.

Jesus Christ is our saviour. Only he can make things right, not just in forgiving our sins, but in making all things new, in redeeming all things.

So, so easy for us, particularly when we've had such a gap between pastors, to really heap a lot of expectation on Andrew, and to get kind of a Messiah complex about this new guy who's coming in, who's going to change everything, and suddenly you're not going to have any problems with the church, and everything's going to run perfectly, and the sermons are all going to run for eight minutes, and seven minutes.

It's not going to happen. Andrew is a sinner like you and me. He gets things wrong, and he's going to get things wrong. He's not going to fix this place.

[24 : 27] Only Jesus is. He's not going to fix your life. Only Jesus can. He's not your saviour. Jesus is. Secondly, Jesus is the head pastor.

Jesus is the senior pastor, not Andrew Reid. See that there in the second part of that verse? The great shepherd of the sheep. That's Jesus. Another way of saying great shepherd is head pastor.

That if there's a hierarchical chart here of the way that we run things at the church, Jesus is at the top, and then everyone else comes underneath. Andrew under him, and so on.

But Jesus is the head pastor of this church. Jesus determines the direction. Jesus is the one we submit to ultimately. Sure, we submit to him, to Andrew. We submit to him in obedience, but he submits to Jesus, and so Jesus is the great shepherd.

He's the head pastor of our sheep. Let's keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Thirdly, related to the first, it's Jesus who will complete you, not Andrew Reid.

[25 : 31] See that verse 21? Jesus will make you complete in everything good, so that you can do his will. I've seen this before in another church situation where we had a lot of struggles among the young men in particular in terms of sin and morality, and we had a new guy come in who was a particularly strong leader, who was kind of a, just one of those leaders who young guys really look to and follow, and instantly they thought that all their problems were going to be fixed, that they were going to be made complete, they weren't going to struggle with things anymore, and it worked for about a week, that they were inspired for about a week.

We need to realize only Jesus makes us complete. Only Jesus redeems us. And finally, most importantly, because of all that, if we keep all that in perspective, with Jesus at the forefront, it's Jesus who gets the glory, not Andrew Reid.

With really good leaders, and successful leaders, who have a bunch of experience behind them, like Andrew does, he's done great things. One of the greatest fears that he would have, is that he will start loving his own glory, more than he loves Jesus' glory.

Like if you just Google Andrew Reid, you'll see a lot of plaudits, and a lot of praise, and a lot of trophies in his cabinet, because God's worked through him, but it's so dangerous, when you start getting too many plaudits.

It's so dangerous, when you start getting a name, for being good at what you do, because suddenly, and particularly with leaders, who are driven this way, it's hard to tell sometimes, whether you're thirsty for God's glory, or for your own.

[27 : 14] Obviously, I believe Andrew, heart is in the right place, but we need to make sure, we see things the way, that I've kind of explained here, that Jesus, is the one who gets the glory, and not Andrew Reid.

So be welcoming, encouraging, send him emails, give him gifts, make sure that, at the end of the day, you're praising Jesus, for what he's doing in this church, and not Andrew Reid.

Through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory, forever and ever. Amen. I thought it would be a cool thing, to do just to finish now, looking ahead to Tuesday night, and then how many years, beyond that, that God gives to Andrew, just to pray for him.

So, just to model, what I've been encouraging you, to do tonight, to pray for, for your leaders in general, and Andrew in particular. It would be good to take five minutes now, just to break up into prayer groups.

Maybe five or so people, just turn around and pray. If you're here tonight, and you're not a Christian, that's fine. You don't have to pray at all. You can just listen to the prayers, that people pray. But please do take this time, to pray for him.

[28 : 32] Him in particular, pray for your leaders in general as well. Pray for, particularly for things like, character, that God would keep your leaders pure, in their marriages, in the way that they deal with their money, just in those kind of areas, in particular, so that they wouldn't be disqualified, and so that when they have to give an account, for the way that they've led you, that they will be able to do that, with joy.

Alright, so let's do five minutes, group prayer, and then, Wayne will take us through.
Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.