

Coram Deo
Soli Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church on
the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Preparing to Succeed”

September 22, 2024

Joshua 1:10-18

George was 28 years old, single, and still living with his parents. One Sunday morning, George told his mother he wasn't going to church. "First," he said, "I'm tired. Second, the people there don't like me. And third, the sermons are dull." But George's mother wouldn't take no for an answer. "George," she said, "you have to go. First, we always worship on Sunday. Second, it doesn't matter whether they like us or not. And third, you are the minister!"

God has always had some rather reluctant leaders. Moses didn't want the job and flat out told God to “find somebody else.” Jeremiah thought he was too young. Jonah didn't like being a prophet to Nineveh and went to great lengths—and depths—to avoid being a leader. David was willing to wait on God to remove Saul before he took the place of leadership in Israel. [OBJ]

And now Joshua was in charge. Israel had spent 40 years preparing for this moment. There was no time to waste. It was now or never. Every leader must face the time when he must make a decision that will be unpopular.

In the middle of the 17th century, England was in turmoil. King Charles I was beheaded. Anglican churches were being closed; Presbyterians were being persecuted. In the midst of all this, Sir Robert Shirley built a church. The plaque on the church read: “In the year 1653, when all things throughout the land were demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley built this church, whose singular praise is this: to have done the best of things in the worst of times.”

Let's decide to do the best of things in the worst of times.

I

To do that, there must be a **strategy (1:10-11)** *“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,¹¹ ‘Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it.’”*

The party aboard ship was in full swing. Speeches were being made by the captain, the crew, and all the guests were really enjoying the week-long voyage. Sitting at the head table was a seventy-year-old man who was kind of embarrassed but was doing his best to accept the praise being poured on him.

Earlier that morning a young woman had somehow fallen overboard, and within seconds this elderly gentleman was in the cold, dark waters at her side. The woman was rescued, and the elderly man became an instant hero. When the time finally came for the brave passenger to speak, the stateroom fell into a hush as he rose from his chair. He went to the microphone and, in what was probably the shortest “hero's” speech ever offered, he spoke these stirring words: “I just want to know one thing, who pushed me?”

Joshua's strategy was simple. He pushed them to go. When he said you have “three days' time,” he was giving them three days in order to get their provisions together because this was

really going to happen. That was the deadline.

Napoleon Hill said, “a goal is a dream without a deadline.” And a dream without a deadline is what you do when you sleep.

Joshua gave them a goal with a deadline, “We’re going across and we’re going to possess the land.” And it is going to happen in three days.

The strategy might seem simple but the fact was that that was all that people needed to know at that time to prepare to go. They had spent 40 years dreaming and planning about the Promised Land but never doing anything about it.

Sometimes dreaming about what you want to do and making plans is a way of avoiding actually doing anything. John Lennon said, “Life is what happens to you when you are busy making plans.”

II

To make the best of things in the worst of times there must be a strategy and there will be **sacrifice (1:12-15)** *To the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said,¹³ "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, "The LORD your God gives you rest and will give you this land."¹⁴ "Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them,¹⁵ until the LORD gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land and possess that which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise. "Joshua said to these two and a half tribes, "Here's the deal. Your wives, your little ones, your cattle, remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan." However, if you want this to happen. It is going to cost. Anything worth having - costs.*

The following are actual responses from comment cards given to the staff members at *Bridger Wilderness and conservation Area* in 1996:

Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill.

Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests.

Please pave the trails...Chair lifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them.

The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.

A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed? Please call...

Escalators would help on steep uphill sections.

A MacDonald's would be nice at the trailhead.

There are too many rocks in the mountains.

“People People...it is a WILDERNESS AREA!!” They were looking for something convenient and comfortable, not a wilderness experience.

In a similar way, many people today do not understand the cost of discipleship.

In 1947, a professor at the University of Chicago was scheduled to teach an advanced seminar in astrophysics. At the time he was living in Wisconsin, doing research. He planned to commute twice a week for the class, even though it would be held during the harsh winter months. Registration for the seminar, however, fell far below expectations. Only two students signed up for the class. People expected the professor to cancel, lest he waste his time. But for

the sake of two students, he taught the class, commuting 100 miles round trip through back country roads in the dead of winter. His students did their homework. Ten years later, in 1957, they both won the Nobel prize for physics. So did the professor in 1983.

God doesn't need large numbers only a committed few who have counted the cost and are willing to pay the price.

III

To make the best of things in the worst of times there must be a strategy and there will be sacrifice, but there has to be **solidarity (1:16-18)** ^[O&J] They went beyond sacrifice to solidarity, that's the last few verses of the chapter. I define solidarity as joyful unity. *"They answered Joshua, saying, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go."¹⁷ "Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you; only may the LORD your God be with you as He was with Moses."¹⁸ "Anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be strong and courageous."*

These Reubenites and Gadites and Manassehites understood about the kingdom required solidarity and integrity of purpose. We are in this together; we are moving forward. The whole nation, community or church is threatened if the individuals within foster a spirit of rebellion division or disunity. And they understood that. They had been

wandering through the wilderness, they had seen or heard the stories of the ground opening up and taking down the rebellious followers of Korah. They realize that rebellion hurts the whole and so they remained in solidarity. Solidarity is not a mindless lockstep or even 100 percent agreement. It's an attitude. It is an attitude that desires common goals, and it is willing to yield individual rights to reach them. That is where success comes in.

Rebellion is an attitude that reflects a self-centered agenda and an unwillingness to act selflessly for the common good. It torpedoes strategy and sacrifice and threatens the integrity of the body.

The following account came to me the other day: I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. I immediately ran over and said, "Stop! Don't do it!" "Why shouldn't I?" he said. I said, "Well, there's so much to live for!" "Like what?" "Well, are you religious or atheist?" "Religious." "Me too! Are you Christian or Jewish?" "Christian." "Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?" "Protestant." "Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?" "Baptist." "Wow! Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?" "Reformed Baptist Church of God." "Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?" "Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915!" To which he said, "Die, heretic scum!" and pushed him off the bridge. Solidarity is vital to success.

As Martin Luther's theological collaborator Philipp Melancthon said, "In essentials, unity; in differences, liberty; in all things, charity." You think about that.

