

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: A Tough Act to Follow

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Scripture:

Joshua 1: 1-9

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷ "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Transcript:

Jesus, thank you for this morning. God, I pray that your words would be in my mouth, that my heart would be committed and dedicated to you while I'm up here. And Lord, open the ears and the hearts of everyone in this room so that we can all learn and grow together. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.

Amen. Good morning.

Good morning.

Today's scripture is from Joshua chapter 1 and it says, "After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aide, 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I'm about to give to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot as I promise Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon and from the Great River, the Euphrates, all the Hittite country, to the Mediterranean Sea in the West, no one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

"Be strong and courageous because you will lead these people into the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this book of the law always on your lips. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you'll be prosperous and successful'."

Today's sermon is about a man named Joshua and he was a leader of Israel. He was victorious in many battles and he was a mighty man of faith. But today's sermon title is called A Tough Act to Follow, because before Joshua there was Moses. And Moses is what we call the greatest of all time. We got to remember that Moses was the one who led the Israel lights out of slavery in Egypt and he split the Red Sea with a staff, okay? And most impressively, he could speak with God face to face like talking with a friend. He's an all around icon. Moses is so iconic that two of the greatest movies ever made are based on his life, The Prince of Egypt and the Ten Commandments, okay? And you're going to freak out a little bit, but the Prince of Egypt is the best animated movie of all time. I even put that over the Lion King. You could find me after 11:00 AM services that we can fight in the parking lot, okay?

But even including Jesus, Moses is in the top three most important figures in the Bible. And it's not a stretch to say that he's in the top 10 most important or most famous religious figures of all time. Moses is not someone that we should pray to or worship, but he is someone that we honor and respect. In Deuteronomy, it concludes, which it's the book before Joshua, and it concludes what the death of Moses. And it says that when Moses died, God himself took his body and buried him in a valley, meaning that God was the pall-bearer of Moses. And in chapter 34 it says that "Since then, no prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all these signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt, to Pharaoh and all His officials, to His Holy Land, for no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." That is what we call a tough act to follow.

And then we come to Joshua chapter 1 and it opens with God calling Joshua to finish the mission that Moses started, to lead the people of Israel into the promised land. And God begins His speech, His inspirational speech to Joshua by saying, "Moses my servant is dead." Pause. Because that's all he says. There's no hyperbole about Moses. There's no list of accomplishments. Nothing about him being the greatest prophet of all time. Nothing about him being the star of two movies. "Moses my servant is dead." Because for God, Moses' greatness was not measured by his accomplishments, but by the fact he was a servant.

Moses was a tough act to follow because he had done it all. And so, who was Joshua that he would become the successor to the greatest of all time? It says that after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' aide, that means Joshua, his qualifications were that he was Moses' assistant, he was an assistant to the servant of God. And Joshua had been an eyewitness to many of Moses' awesome and mighty deeds. They were in this multi-generational relationship. He had soaked in all that Moses was and all that Moses had done. But in other words, he had become a great follower before he was a great leader. And so when God calls Joshua, he calls him to be strong and courageous.

Last time I was preaching I talked about Bible verses that get used like fortune cookies. They're verses that are extremely popular but they're often taken out of context because they make us feel good personally, and Joshua 1:8 and 1:9 are one of those verses, "Be strong and courageous." We know this one. But God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous three times in the first chapter for four different reasons. The first reason is the people that Joshua was about to lead. The Israelite while they were God chosen people, they were hardheaded and they were always complaining, sinning and turning to other false gods. And then two, the land that they were about to possess. One would not simply walk into the promised land. The land was inhabited. You got that reference. That was a Lord of the Rings reference if you didn't know. The land wasn't inhabited though by some of the most evil civilizations in history. They were militarily stronger than the Israelites. War was on the horizon for Israel. And three, the man he was going to succeed, Moses again, the best to ever do it.

And then four, the God he was going to have to serve. He was going to serve Yahweh who was fierce, who was holy and awesome. He was slow to anger and abounding in love, but he also has zero tolerance for sin and evil being among His people. And so this was no easy job for Joshua. God said be strong and courageous not because it made him feel good, but because he was going to need it. There's going to be many challenges, much heartbreak ahead for Israel. And all of that they would have to go through before they got to live into their vision.

Pastor Scott has said in recent sermons that he sees beautiful things ahead for this church. I agree with him. I also think though that there's a lot of ugly things and gross things that we're going to have to go through before we get to see that beauty. In which case we will need to be a church that is strong and courageous. We were in a sermon series called Be Thou My Vision about following God's lead in uncertain times. And in Joshua 1 the Israelites were living in

uncertain times because they had this promised land that they weren't living in yet and their leader, their greatest leader was dead. And so again, why did God choose Joshua? I think we find one of the many answers in Exodus 33, and this is several years before Joshua chapter 1.

At this point of the story in Exodus, God had rescued the Israelites out of Egypt. They had seen him perform all the great miracles, but they soon forgot all that God had done and they made a false God for themselves to worship. And our God is absolutely angry. I was going to say another word. He was angry, but he tells Moses, he says, "I'm going to give you the land that I promise to Abraham because our God keeps His promises, His end of the deal." He even says, "I'm going to prepare the way for you to get there." But then God says, "I'm not going with you because if I spend a single moment with you stiff neck people, I'm going to destroy you all." And I'm not joking. That's actually what the scripture says. He says he's going to destroy us.

But in order for Moses to meet with God, he had to build a special tent on the outskirts of their encampment. This was the place where God will come because if he got close, he might destroy them. So here's why I think Joshua became the prime choice for the leader of Israel in [inaudible 00:09:48] verse 11, it says, "In the tent, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp. But his young aide, Joshua, the son of Nun, did not leave the tent." Joshua stayed in the tent where he was experiencing God's presence all the time. Even when Moses left, Joshua stayed. It's like Joshua, "It's a sunny dance in Seattle, we got to go outside." But Joshua stays in the tent. "Joshua the Mariners are in the playoffs, we got to go watch the game." Joshua stayed in the tent. And I'm happy for you Mariners fans, just to say.

But this is why Joshua was described as a man who was full of a spirit because it didn't just happen, he actually put the time in to concern himself with the will of God. And so the question for us today is when do you have your tent time? Tent time is the intentional time we spend seeking God for matters big or matters small or we just do it just to know him more. And so I want to share two quick tent time ideas for all of you.

The first one is give 10% of your time on your next project or your next challenge to consulting God in prayer. So if you spend 30 hours preparing for a presentation or a product launch, spend three of those hours consulting God in prayer. Not all at once, you can space it out. And then if you spend 30 minutes worrying about something or panicking, give the next three minutes to God and seeking what he would have you do. And parents, if you're not already doing this, read the Bible and pray with your children, morning or night, find your own rhythm of how it's going to work. And a bonus, watch the Prince of Egypt with them. And when you watch it, also read the Bible so you can spot the differences between the scripture and the movie itself. But that's an easy access point for you.

Every disciple needs tent time. Not just pastors, not just adults, but children need it too. So BelPres, we got to find our tents and we got to make time for it. Because in Joshua's faithfulness to God and in his tent time, it unlocked God's presence and God's promises to the Israelites. But

I do have news, God's promises... You might not like this news either, but God's promises come with the stipulation, and that stipulation is obedience. As we talk about this vision for our church and what might God do through our church in the next five years, there's only one way it will be successful. And that is for us to live like God is real and that he means what he says.

In Joshua 1:7-8 God says, "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left so that you would be successful wherever you go. Keep this book of the law always on your lips. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you'll be prosperous and successful." Success with God comes at a cost. Even under Jesus, with all the grace and all the freedom we love to sing about, we still have to obey Jesus. And Jesus calls us to do this in Matthew 28 in the Great Commission where Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I'm with you always to the very end of the age."

And so if you're new to Jesus and you're still learning about him and you're still wondering about this whole discipleship thing, I think it's really important that you get this, because as you get to know Jesus more, he's going to start asking things of you that are uncomfortable and that are inconvenient. And I want to tell you, beware if anyone that preaches that Jesus will never ask anything of you because they're lying. A deal with the devil has hidden fees but obedience to Jesus, Jesus is always upfront with the cost. He never hides it. And I want to be clear too that salvation is free, but discipleship costs something. And so obedience is not bad because God is good than obedience is great. It gets us more of God's success, more of His prosperity and more of His presence in our lives and in our church.

And as Pastor Rich Leatherberry taught us last week, God blesses the nations through us when we follow His commands. In Joshua, God said, "I'll be with you always as I was with Moses." And Jesus says, "I'll be with you till the end of the age." When we're obedient to Jesus and we follow His kingdom values, he will make certain of our success. And that has been the testimony of this church too. A few weeks ago we saw a video about the history of the past 67 year history of this church and all that God has done. For some of you in this room, that history video was memories that you can testify to about God's faithfulness. But for those of us who are new, they're just stories. If you've been attending here for five years or less, I consider you a new BelPreser like myself. I've only been around for five years, I've been on staff for four. And in the grand scheme of 67 years, five years is not a long time at all. But I do believe that Jesus is calling us new people to contribute to this church's story.

New people though, we have to get engaged. We can't contribute to the story if we just sit. And so many of you who are new, and I'm speaking to the 11th time visitors, you haven't let anyone know you yet, and maybe you sit in the back so you can leave early, or maybe you've been joining online not out of necessity, but just because of comfort. I do believe that the time is coming soon where Jesus is going to ask us and he's going to speak to you to contribute to this

church's story for the next 67 years so that you can be more than a church attender but a disciple.

I can stand up here and say this boldly because I was one of you. I was coming here several months in outside of my roommate Gabe, there were a few people that I knew and I'd come on Sunday and I'd leave quickly. However, I was a real pro because I would come to our old 6:00 PM service because there was no sign up sheet at the 6:00 PM service. You just got to come and do your thing and go. But I knew because I was coming from California and I just knew I did not like getting more involved in church stuff. I had done a lot of stuff in California and I wanted to pursue my own personal dreams and goals. No more church stuff. This is a true story because after a few months of being here as a church attender, I heard Jesus tell me, this is a true story, he said, "All right, you've been here long enough, it's time to at least serve the coffee." Sounds funny. I'm serious.

But that was an easy moment of obedience for me. I was obedient because I thought I would be safe from getting more involved in the life of the church. But then it all spiraled out of control. I ended up meeting more people. I got sent on a trip to Cambodia. I was asked to co-lead one of our racial justice Bible studies. And then I started teaching drawing classes at Eastside Academy all before I was asked to apply for a job here. And so my point is, if you're considering getting engaged in anything, do not start with a coffee, okay? There's something in the coffee.

But if you are a part of this new generation of BelPres, I want to encourage you, don't just consume, be part of the harvest that Jesus is bringing. And if you just got started, keep it up. And so rewind back to my first Sunday here. My first Sunday I was in the sanctuary building and I was in the pew there. I looked around. Another true story, I'm going to confess, but I looked around the room and I was like, "I'm never coming back here again." And I said that because everyone around me was older and they were all white. This is before we started having some modern and new hope integration. But ironically though, the first people in this church to have me into their house were an older white couple. And some of you may know them and some of you don't, but this is Steve and Charlotte Roberts. Steve particularly have served... They've both been members of this church longer than I've been alive.

Steve has served faithfully across a variety of ministries. He was on the team that helped start Jubilee Service Day. He was a leader in Congregations for the Homeless. He started the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns council, and he's been engaged in mission work in Haiti. He also served on the search committee that brought Pastor Scott Dudley to this church. And so whatever you think is cool about this church, Steve was likely heavily engaged in making it happen. But today, Steve has an inoperable brain tumor and he will soon die. And a piece of BelPres' legacy and its history will go with him.

A few weeks ago we had a celebration of Steve's life and his work. And I was looking around at this event and all the people who were there in the room and some of you were there and I

was like, "Wow, all these people here, these are BelPres legends." These are the people who were present and active in the things that we heard about in that history video. They served on the committees, they served on the prayer teams. And years ago, BelPres had a vision to become a church that the Eastside could not live without. And at this event, these were all the fully engaged disciples that were there that made it happen. And they were all there loving and supporting their brother Steve.

And so my point is, when Steve spoke at his celebration, he didn't share about any of the cool stuff he did like Haiti or Congregations for the Homeless. He only shared about the Lord Jesus. And he shared about his friends and colleagues that helped him grow in his faith. There were two things that Steve said were the greatest contributors to his discipleship, he said this church and his wife Charlotte.

So the whole celebration ended up being not a celebration of his life and work, but it ended up being a testimony service to Steve's life because it wasn't the things that he did that mattered, it was what he had become. And in light of Steve's diagnosis, he's been quoted saying, "Don't pray that I get better. I know where I'm going." That is a level of faith that many of us do not have yet, but we will get there. Steve has publicly served God in His community globally and in the church. And even when facing death, he's proclaiming and living for the Lord Jesus. And so like Moses was to Joshua, Steve is a tough act to follow.

But he's only one man who's a part of a generation of BelPresers. Like many of you in this room, you've led through big culture shifting initiatives like the ripple effect. You all are a Moses generation and you all are a tough act to follow. But let me be clear in my analogy. I'm not suggesting we do a torch passing ceremony here because I really think that we're still... We're not even in Joshua chapter 1 yet. We're still in Deuteronomy somewhere where Moses and Joshua are overlapping, meaning that there's work for Joshua and Moses to do together. Because Joshua and Moses, they were in a multi-generational relationship. And at this church, we believe that disciples live connected to a multicultural, multi-generational community. And that means we'll have to listen to stories and ideas that are out of date, and then sometimes references that are too new and unproven to understand. But it says in Deuteronomy that the value of Moses is without question or comparison, but the Joshua generation has to start stepping up.

And here's how I think he can work. It says, "Now, Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the spirit because Moses had laid his hands on him so that Israelite listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses." And so as a church, we're following God's lead in uncertain times, but it will never work unless the Moses generation blesses the Joshua generation and unless us of the Joshua generation bless those of you who are in this Moses generation. We need to be a church that practices blessing and honor.

And so here's our homework. For the next year... And remember, I don't preach a lot, so I give to give a long homework time. You got a year to do this, okay? For those of you who are in the Moses generation, pray and ask God, "Who can I bless?" And then if you're new here and you're in the Joshua generation, pray and ask, "Who can I honor?" This is how we're going to make it as a multicultural, multi-generational church. Three things to remember; we need to get in our tents, we need to pass blessing and honor across the generations, and we need to be obedient to Jesus. And if we do that last one, Jesus himself said that he will be with us always. Emmanuel. God with us. He will be with us, leading us, commanding us, loving us, guiding us until the very end of the age. Amen? Amen.

Amen. Let's pray. Jesus, thank you for this church. Thank you for the veterans. Thank you for the emerging leaders. Lord make us obedient to you. And we thank you for Steve Roberts and his life. Lord, may you build up and raise up new Steve's in this church, men and women who will be fully devoted to you and will live like you are Lord and you are a savior. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Moses and Joshua were from two different generations, yet they honored and blessed one another, what steps are you taking or can you take to embrace a multigenerational relationship?
- God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous and to follow the law that Moses gave him in order to have success. What's challenging for you about obeying God and his word and how can you grow in doing it?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.