

THE BON AIR PULPIT

January 10, 1999

Scripture: *Joshua 1*

Sermon: *Keys to Successful Living*

In 1932 Adolph Huxley published his ethic-making novel called "The Brave New World". You might recall that in that novel, Huxley painted an unusual type of society. He said it would be a society where pain, struggle, discomfort, and effort would be eliminated, and the answer to the problems would be a drug by the name of "Soma." Soma would take all the rough edges off life, and we will carry around our virtues in a bottle. It is Christianity without pain. You might also recall that towards the end of that novel a savage from the fringe of civilization appeared again; this is what he said, "Tears are necessary. You get rid of them, it is like getting rid of your life. It's too easy, I don't want comfort I want poetry, I want danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want God." All of us in our life understand that how we respond to the challenges of our life determine what kind of person we are going to be and what kind of difference we are going to make in our world.

There was a man by the name of Joshua who had to determine how he was going to respond. That story was told in the book that bears his name. It also tells us how you and I have to respond to the challenges that we confront. Joshua was ready to lead the people of Israel into their land of promise; it was a time in which he was to take two million people to invade a land and to claim it for God. And in the time in which he was getting ready to go to

battle, God came to him and said, "Joshua, let me tell you what is necessary for success. In fact, you are going to see the word "success" appear two times. You and I read it because all of us have to determine whether we are going to move forward, meet the challenges that God has for us, or whether we are going to take some kind of spiritual Soma and just take the easy ways of life. So let me read for you what God said to Joshua, and I hope that you will hear what he is saying to you.

Three times in these few little lines He uses this phrase "be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to your forefathers to give to 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 the left, then you will be successful wherever you go. Do not let the book of the law depart from your mouth, 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. Have I not commanded you to be strong and courageous, do not be terrified, do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Every person in this room will face all kinds of challenges and opportunities. Some of you are at the point in your life where you are having to determine whether you are going to move on and become what God wants you to be or whether you are going to slip back and miss the chance.

God said to Joshua, let me tell you the first thing that you need. You need some character traits that will enable you to be the kind of person to meet the challenge. I don't know why God, in a few lines, turned to Joshua and three times said you need to be strong, you need to be courageous. But I know that when my Dad used to come to me and say you can do it, you can do it, you can do it, he understood that I was having lots of trouble. And I think part of the problem was that the great leader

of their nation had just died. Moses, the man of God, had been buried and now it was time for Joshua to stand forward, it was time for Joshua to become the leader. I am sure that he was living under the shadow of this great man saying, "I can never be a Moses, I can never do what Moses did" and God is saying to him, "but it is your turn now, it's you to step forward and I want to tell you that if you are strong and you are courageous and you have quality of character, then you will be able to do what I want you to do."

Strength of character simply means that you do not let circumstances crush you. You are not always being moved by the circumstances around you but, rather, you are moving the circumstances yourself. You are not a buck passer, you are not always blaming somebody else, you are not always saying that it is somebody else's fault, you are not saying "Well if the circumstances were different I would be different." A person with character, a person with strength of character is a person who is always willing to stand forward and to say "I'm going to do it, and I'm going to continue to move on and stand firm."

It was on September 9, 1492, that Christopher Columbus and 89 other men set sail in three small boats to try to find the short route to India. They sailed for 31 days, longer than any group of people had ever sailed without the sight of land, and finally on October 10th they all got together and stopped and the sailors said, "we are not going any further." Columbus talked them into going three more days. Thank heaven, they saw land after two. Three more days, and you will recall those famous words that he stood on the bow of the ship and said, "Sail on, Sail on." No one would have ever questioned those men if they had turned around and gone back; but I have to tell you, you would not have known whom to blame because you would never have heard of them. And the reason we heard of them is that these men said, "We have

reached the limit of our endurance; the food is terrible; we sailed off the chart; the ships are small, but **we will go on.**" Strength of character, he turned to Joshua and said, is the kind of people who will determine that they will keep on going even when it looks like the odds are too great. He said I want you not only to be strong, but the second character trait you have to have is courage.

Courage is pro-active; courage is standing forward and saying I want to move on, and guess what gang, I want you to come join me. Character looks difficulty in the eye and says "I will meet it, and I will overcome it." Someone said a hero is a person who continues thirty minutes past when everyone else gives up. And he turns and he says I want you now to turn to these people and challenge them and say to them I want you to go ahead. I love the Ruffus Adair story out of Noonin, Georgia. He was running for sheriff; he got a list of all of the voters, and he was going from house to house asking for their support. He went to a man's house and said "I'm Ruffus Adkinson, I'm running for sheriff with Noonin." The man turned and said "Ruffus, I know you and don't like you, I think you would be a terrible sheriff. I'm not going to vote for you." Mr. Adkinson shook his hand and turned to the man who was with him and said "Write doubtful." He was the man who simply was not going to let loose; guess who became Sheriff of Noonin County? He was the man who said, regardless of the difficulties I have I'm going to move ahead. Now you can spend your life, if you will, blaming others, saying if the circumstances were different, saying the challenges are too great. Or you can say, With God's help, I will be the kind of person who will meet difficulties." Let me quote for you a passage of scripture, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His

might..." And even when you feel you can't take another step, God will give you the strength and the resources you need to move ahead. Second thing He said, you not only need strength of character, you need a chart or compass to know where to go. What I want you to do then, is I want you to be able to read this book so that you will know the direction in which you are to go. We have just gone through the holidays. My sons were in with their families and you have found out as I have that you see these wonderful things in the store and you buy them for your children. They don't put them together, they give you a box and you go home, and my son has a Ph.D. degree and he couldn't figure it out. So we were sitting up all night and he said lets keep reading the instructions, read the instructions. Let me ask you, If it takes a book of instructions to put a bike together, what about your life? Did God just say Good Luck!?! Follow your instincts, if it feels good do it. Did God make this wonderful thing we call life and then just say "Well everybody's got to find out for themselves?" Of course not. Read the book, follow the instructions, know what he says, make it a part of your life. You see there are so many voices that are there, so many things that call your attention and demand your weight. And if you don't have instructions you are not going to know what to do. Example: 17th Street in Washington DC. You're trying to determine if you are going to take that street or not; this is what you will read:

One Way
Do Not Enter
M-F
7-7
Except Sundays and Holidays

By the time you figure that out, you have been wiped out four times. Do you know which way

to go when I just told you that? Of course you don't. How can you know where to go in life, if you don't have a book of instructions. He said read it, Joshua, study it,

meditate on it and make it part of your life, and He said what you will find in it is that it will test whether you really want to obey me or not. So when I read it, it is not only a chart or a compass, it helps me to know what my real spirit before God is.

Your child comes to you and tells you something you have not heard in a long time. I'm hungry! You say what can I fix for you? Peanut butter and jelly sandwich. So you just slap it all over. Fix it up. So they eat it except they stop at the crust, always stop at the crust. So they are going through the living room and they just throw it all over the floor and you say "Dear, we don't throw the remains of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on the floor." Now let me ask you parents, on a scale from one to ten, how serious is it to throw the remains of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the floor? But when you say dear we don't do that, all of a sudden you get this, "I'm tired of you telling me what to do, if I want to throw a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the floor, I can throw it on the floor and if you want it picked up you can pick it up yourself!" Now how serious is it? This is the book of instructions (the Bible); it is the test of obedience. I read it, I say "God I'm tired of you telling me how to run my life, I want to run my life like I want to run my life." And God says "Oh, we've got a problem." Why did He give us this? Because when I read it then I could say "Dear God, if it says it then I want to do it, and if it says it I want to follow you." Who meets the challenges of life? The person who follows The Word.

They play golf at a course he had never played before. The man got up and said, "I know you are going to miss this shot, this is a hard hole." He got

up and said, "See all those trees over there, you are going to end up in those trees." He hit it and it went right over the trees. He waited for them to broadcast him on NBC. He noticed everybody else was going this way, he said "Look there, they took the easy way." He went over; unfortunately, he was in the woods, they were all over there, he was over here. He said "I hit the best shot I ever hit, it landed right on the green. I walked out of the woods, I saw all of my friends going that way, I realized I was shooting at the wrong hole." The green was over here. You see you can be as sincere as you want and be wrong. How do you know whether you are right or wrong? you read The Word, you study it, you meditate on it. God says that is the only way you can ultimately be successful.

Third thing He said, you're going to come to the place where you understand you have a great companion. I want you to know, Joshua, I am with you. There is one promise all the way through this book, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. Never do you face circumstances by yourself. Never are you alone, God is with you. When He came to give us the greatest demonstration of Himself, He said "Call His name Emanuel, that means God is with us." How wonderful to know that if everybody else seems to be turning around, going away, God is with you. And it is still true that God and one is a majority. Someone said, "I don't like to be around God, He is the one who sees through you." I wanted to give you the other side, God is the one who sees you through, He is the one who sustains you, He is the one who helps you, He is the one who gives you the strength that you need. I love the sign that was on the subway in New York. A skeptic had taken black paint and had written: "God is nowhere." Somebody came along, blotted out the "w" and moved it over to where it now said: "God is now here." And in Jesus Christ God has moved the "w" and He

wanted to tell you that every challenge you face, He is now here with you.

All of us have to determine what kind of people we are going to be, you can spend the rest of your life saying I'm not going to confront that, I'm not going to move ahead, that's too much for me, I'm not going to You can slip back off or you can stand and become the kind of person God wants to you be, you can meet the challenges that are before you and you can go on to make a difference in this world. I wanted to challenge you today to be the kind of person Joshua was, who moved on to become what God wanted and to accept the challenges that God had given him. Some of you are going to have to make that decision in just a moment because you are aware that God has been working in your life. God has been leading you to do some things, maybe to commit your life to Christ, maybe to be a part of this church family and to get very involved and to grow in our Christian life. And He has been leading you along and in just a few moments you are going to have to decide whether you are going to step forward and be what God wants or whether you are going to just slip back and take the easy way. I wanted to challenge you today, I wanted to challenge you today to step up and be what God wants you to be. Some of you need to come and confess your faith in Christ, some of you need to come and be a part of our church family, some of you are believers and need very much to say "God, I am so tired of being a person who resists circumstances and challenges and I want to step forward to the plate." I want to ask you now as we always stand together and sing to provide an opportunity for those of you to make a public decision, to do so. I want to ask you to do it now. Would you?

Lets stand together .

