

Taking First Steps

'A Nation Under God'

Joshua 1:1-5

"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 am about to give to them – to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert of Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates – all the Hittite country – to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up 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.'" Joshua 1:1-5

They are just words on a page. But when you know the story behind the words, and then you hear them 'the words' take on a whole new meaning.

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.Declaration of Independence

These words adopted on July 4th 1776, unleashed a firestorm from the British King.

'The Revolutionary War' or the 'American Revolution'

- 4435 men died in combat in the Revolutionary War,
- Another 2000 more men died in Valley Forge

Valley Forge was not a battle of weapons it was a battle of wills. The British had taken Philadelphia, and had they continued to move into the interior of the country the outcome of the war could have been very different. Their very presence was reason that the British did not advance, but the British had little to no idea what was happening in the encampment. Led by Gen. George Washington 12,000 men entered the valley on Dec 19th 1777, they would not leave until June 19, 1778. (6 months) No battle was ever fought, the winter was brutal and food was almost nonexistent. Of the 12,000 men who entered Valley Forge, approx 2000 would die of

starvation, disentry, and other conditions caused by malnutrition. The question was why did they not desert?Because these men believed in a few words, written on a page.

85 years after valley forge, a man stood on a cold day in November 1863 and had scribbled a few words on a page. The speech he gave only lasted 2 minutes. It has become known argueably as the greatest, most well known speech in American history.

He stood over a battlefield where over 46,000 American soldiers had become casualties, over 8000 of those were dead or would die, and he said,

Gettysburg Address

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Abraham Lincoln

These scribbled words on a page would turn the civil war, away from being a battle about slavery and toward understanding that we, as a nation must return to the foundations on which we stand. And these few words on a page, spoken out, would turn the hearts of men and women back toward One nation under God.

I ended last week by talking about knowing 4 things

- Jesus is central
- God is in control
- We are sinful
- God overcomes our sinful nature through Jesus Christ by his power and love

- And our Mission as a church is to ‘Go and Make Disciples...’

They are the words on the page for us as a church. If you do not believe these words but you want to continue with the church, I would be glad to meet with you. If you do believe these words, then you know; there is more than just ‘Knowing’. The soldiers at Valley Forge, the soldiers in the battles following Gettysburg, knew the words on the page, and it caused them to fight for the first steps as a nation, and to reform as a nation after experiencing Civil war.

The question today is, ‘What is required to move these words off the page and into action? So that we can become the nation changers/world changers/life changers God has always intended for us to be:

A look at these first 5 verses of Joshua give us a view of what is required. Psalm cuts to the chase as to what Joshua’s words on the page were.

*“He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded for a thousand generations.”
Psalm 105:8*

He knew he stood on the edge of something great. The words on the page were, *that God had made a covenant with his people and that God would give them a land flowing with milk and honey.* Joshua stood on the bank of the Jordan and he saw the land.

Many of you know the words on the page, “Go and Make Disciples”. Many of you know also that if a church, takes seriously these words and puts them into action that it not only will electrify us, it is the thing that will heal our nation. We stand on the bank of the Jordan, with Joshua. It will do us well to listen to what happens here.

The First Steps Of A Nation or the Healing of a Nation Require:

1. Leadership That Hears God’s Voice.

*“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. Joshua 1:1-2a*

All the training, all the mentoring was over. If Joshua ever said around those camp fires, “When am I going to get my shot, when is someone going to listen to me.” He was now facing the music. And it all boils down to this. Have you learned to hear God’s voice. In that encampment on the east side of the Jordan River, all alone, Joshua heard His voice.

If after all the sermons, all the trainings I do or others do in this church, after I preach my last sermon. If I have failed to teach you, to hear His voice and once having heard, respond to it. If I fail to do that, then I have accomplished nothing with my life in regard to you. Moses did his job, Joshua heard the Lord. The first step of nation changers is they hear the voice of God.

Then God went onto bring out the next requirement

2. Visionary Leadership – by saying

“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.” Joshua 1:2b

For a person who is ready, God does not linger in the past for any length of time...The Jordan River had represented literally that line in the sand that the Israelites would not cross. God said to Joshua, Time's Up. This happens so often in the bible that we can safely say, this is part of God's nature. When he is ready to move, he aligns, everything. There was a nation ready to be born, on the other side of that river and he needed a leader and a people who were willing to cross.

So first, it requires that we hear God. Secondly it requires Visionary Leadership that can see the future.

3. It requires Courageous Leadership

“I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.” Joshua 1:3

The promise was clearly there, “I will give you every place...as I promised Moses” but the part in the middle was the kicker. “where you set your foot”. That means Joshua, you have to go get it. Meaning, Joshua, this is going to require courage, it is going to require everything you've got.

Let me not beat around the bush here. As believers the words on the page for us are, seek out the lost and to go and make disciples. In light of what Jesus did for us, To seek and to Go, is our battle cry. Therefore as members of the body of Christ we forfeit the right to say, “Hey we are good, we have done enough. There is always new territory where he wants us to set our feet. And it will take courage.

Then finally in these first steps toward a nation under God's authority, God invites Joshua to one last requirement

4. Trusting Leadership – He asks Joshua to trust him. He says:

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Joshua 1:5b

Ultimately, a leader/a person who can trust God. I mean when the chips are down, is a leader who can be trusted by others. It is that sense that we are given by God that says, Look everything is going to be alright. ...I have a painting on the wall of my living room and I brought it in today, it is George Washington kneeling and it says...

The Prayer At Valley Forge: I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God and those who have the superintendence of them into His holy keeping. George Washington