Be Strong and Courageous

Joshua 1:6-9

Good morning! It is a pleasure to be with all of you this morning on our charter Sunday! Today is a very exciting and monumental step in the history of the Nankin Community Church. This church has been serving the community for a century and has a very storied past having gone through many changes in both leadership at the pulpit as well as changes in the building as well as the community itself. I find it to be a special privilege to be taking part in this special occasion. Today we need to take a few moments to discuss what the future of this congregation will be and what we need to do moving forward to make certain that this congregation always stays focused on the commission of making disciples in this community.

 If you have your Bible with you or using one of the Bibles provided in the pew please open up to the Old Testament book of Joshua. After Moses went up to the Mountain of Nebo and was permitted to see the promised land, he died having completed the work that the Lord had called him to do. Joshua takes over as the leader of the people. We know that Joshua had some really big shoes (sandals) to fill and he was most certainly overwhelmed with the weight of responsibility that had been placed on his shoulders. Before he begins to lead the people God shares with him very important instructions that would sustain him as he led the nation of Israel in to the Promised Land. What we are going to discover today is that the instructions God gave Joshua are instructions that will serve us well as we continue the work of Nankin Community Church going into the future. If we follow these instructions God will help us to complete the work that He has called us to do in this community. The work is not easy, we will sometimes face adversity and resistance, but no matter what may come against us we must remain focused on Scripture and allow it to guide us in every decision we make as a church. Let us begin today by reading Joshua 1:6-9 together:

**“Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the Law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may achieve success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will achieve success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not be terrified nor dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”**

 As we begin this new period of history for Nankin Community Church let us consider the instructions that God gave to Joshua in this passage. The first instruction God gives Joshua is that he needed to be strong and courageous. This was very important for Joshua because he was about to begin the campaign of defeating all of the kingdoms in Canaan so that Israel could take possession of the land that God had promised to them. The people of Israel had already spied out the land in the days of Moses and were terrified at the size of the people in the land and because of that fear would not attack as God had commanded. This is what led to the people wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Their refusal to have faith in God led to their judgment. God was reminding Joshua that He would always be with him and guide him through these challenging times if he would only do what God had commanded him. This is also true for us in this church. God will continually be with us and guide us if we follow His instructions and do the best we can to follow His teachings found in Scripture. We cannot fear those outside of the church who may seem to be giants of the culture who want us to redefine what God’s Word clearly teaches. Now that God had told Joshua to be brave as he faced the kingdoms in Canaan, he will now inform Joshua what needed to be done so that he would have success in this campaign of securing the Promised Land for the nation of Israel.

 In verse 7 God tells Joshua to make certain to do everything that the book of law commands and not to turn from it in either direction. This instruction is something that this church is established on and also our primary foundation. The first component of this command is that Joshua is told to follow all of the commands that are found in the book of the law. In the same manner, we are being commanded to follow all of the commands of Scripture and to be obedient to the teachings of Christ and the Apostles without changing what Scripture says. One way that our church is doing this is in the way that we study Scripture. We use a method of studying Scripture known as expository preaching. When we gather for worship, we study God’s Word by looking at the Scripture verse by verse allowing the Scripture to guide us into what we will be studying. The advantage of this kind of preaching is that Scripture guides us into what we will be looking at every week. One of the disadvantages of topical preaching is that the pastor allows his own preferences to select what will be discussed and when this is done it is possible that certain aspects of Scripture will be overlooked and/or ignored. We cannot pick and choose what we will study in the Bible because as we are told by the Apostle Paul **“All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness…” (2 Timothy 3:16).** To ignore or avoid teaching any part of Scripture is a huge error and something that we as a church will try our best not to do.

 In regard to the comment God makes when He says that the book of the law is to be followed without swaying to the right or to the left means that we are not permitted to take anything away from the Bible nor are we permitted to add anything to it. In the culture today we see this happening quite a lot because there is this idea out there that the Bible is no longer able to address the issues of our society. In one area we see Scripture having things being taken away from it are the verses that specifically address God’s design for marriage and human sexuality. We are hearing many teachers of the Bible saying that the Bible makes no claims that homosexuality is improper or against the natural order created by God. In order to make this argument the verses regarding homosexuality would have to be removed from Scripture (Leviticus 18:22, 1 Cor. 6:9-11 and 1 Tim. 1:10). Even though some may find this teaching to be intolerant, it is in Scripture and cannot be ignored.

 On the other side we are not permitted to add to Scripture. Any church that claims that Scripture needs to be aided by another testament or book is not in line with the teachings of the Bible. The Apostle John writes in the book of Revelation that anyone who adds or takes away from that book will be judged. I believe the same argument needs to be made regarding the entirety of Scripture. God has given all of the information we need to live a Godly life in His Scripture therefore nothing needs to be added to it. As a church family we will hold ourselves accountable to the words of Scripture being the final authority in all matters.

 The next statements God makes in this passage is that not only is the Word of God the final authority in all matters, but we must meditate on Scripture constantly so that it is always on our minds. This has been the focus behind our congregation reading through the Bible in a year. When we open Scripture every day and allow the Words of God to enter our minds, we are being conditioned to live according to the words that proceed from it. Moses instructed the nation of Israel that in order to live a life honoring to God man must not just live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Deut. 8:3) Meditating on the Word of the Lord both day and night will result in man having success in all that he does which aligns with the will of God.

 What we need to discuss now is the reason why this constant reliance on Scripture is so important for the church. If any of you are familiar with other religions such as Buddhism, I am certain you are aware of what meditation is in that religion. Meditation is Buddhism is when the person removes everything from their minds so that they can achieve something called enlightenment with the universe. The way to attain enlightenment is to remove all things from the mind so that the entire focus will be on reaching this enlightened state of mind. God commanding Joshua to meditate on the book of the law day and night is not for him to empty his mind, rather he is being instructed to fill his mind with the Law of God. Reading and meditating on the Word of God makes it become the natural way someone thinks and therefore every situation in life will be looked at from the perspective of God’s Word. When we are encountered with any situation in life where we must make an ethical or moral decision, having the word of God implanted in our mind will help us to make the decision that is most pleasing to God. This meditation, therefore, is filling our minds with the knowledge of God rather than emptying our minds to seek an enlightened state of mind.

 As we conclude the passage today, we find that God promises Joshua that if he remains strong and courageous by following the Law of God then God will be with him no matter where he goes and in whatever he does. Nankin Community Church has the same goal in mind. By placing your membership with Nankin Community Church you will receive instruction directly from the Word of God even though it is coming from a fallible man. The position of Pastor in this church is a serious role that you have given me. I take it seriously and I want you to know that I will use the tools God has given me to the best of my ability to share the Word with you in an applicable manner. With that being said, as we have seen recently in the news a church cannot elevate their pastor to a position of celebrity status or to a position of worship. Katie found this quote posted on Facebook last week and I feel it explains what I am saying very well: “Don’t put your pastor on a pedestal where he can be knocked off. Put your pastor on a prayer list where he can be lifted up.” I am not any better of a person than any of you and the fact I am just like you means that I can and will most likely have a time when I will let you down. No one in this world is perfect like our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore we must be willing to extend to each other grace. Just like I told you earlier, the Word of God will be proclaimed in this church but I must also ask for your grace in knowing that since the church is made up of sinners each of us will at time fall short of God’s call to holiness. What we need to do is continually life each other up and encourage as we seek to honor God through the teaching and ministry of this church. If we do this in the spirit of love and honor to God He will guide and direct our paths as we move forward.

 Let us conclude today by reviewing our statement of faith as established in our church constitution. Here is a list of the essentials of our faith as outlined on the website as well as in our church constitution.

1. We believe that Scripture is inspired by God and has the supreme authority in all matters of life. The Apostle’s Creed and John 3:16 lay the foundation that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way for sins to be forgiven leading to salvation and eternal life in the presence of God.

2. We believe that mankind has been created in the image of God, male and female. When man sinned, he inherited physical as well as spiritual death. Mankind, therefore, exists in a state of depravity and is guilty of sin. Marriage, as sanctioned by God, is the joining together of one man and one woman. We do not perform same-sex weddings nor do we allow them to be performed on this property.

3. We believe that baptism is an outward sign of obedience and profession of faith in Christ, however, it is not required for salvation. All people should be baptized. If you are joining the church today and are not yet baptized, please speak with me as soon as possible.

4. We also believe that the Lord’s Supper represents the broken body and shed blood of Christ which has paid the penalty for our sins. Everyone is welcome to join us for the Lord’s Supper.

5. We believe that our members are united with members from other churched who proclaim and believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

6. We believe the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your mind and with all of your strength. The second is love you neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment great than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

 Today as we establish the Nankin Community Church let us devote ourselves to the work that God is calling us to do. We are to make disciples in this community and to provide instruction in God’s Word that will edify and equip disciples of Jesus Christ to make more disciples in His name. May this always be our ultimate priority. We will succeed in these goals if we keep Scripture and the Holy Spirit as our guides. We will be known as Christians by our love, but we will also be known by our obedience to the Word of the Lord.