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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Series: Courageous Living in a Dangerous World

23 After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, ²summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am very old. ³You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. ⁴Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵The LORD your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

⁶“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. ⁷Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. ⁸But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

⁹“The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

I have a mission statement that I want to read to you from a university. It's one you know -- probably not a person in this room today has never heard of this university. You may not recognize it by its mission statement, but let me give it to you at its founding. “This university exists to plainly instruct people to consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and to know Jesus Christ.”

Any ideas what kind of university? To be plainly instructed and to consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ. Feel free to guess out loud. You've heard this one, haven't you? It's Harvard. 1636. To work at Harvard, you had to be a Christian. Not just professors -- to be on campus. Now, to work at Harvard, you can't be a Christian. Not quite that bad, but it's close. Eighty years after it was founded, there was a group of New England pastors that got together, because they already had seen the drift, and they recognized that there was a drift occurring and they were afraid that they couldn't stop it, and so they went to a gentleman, a friend of theirs by the name of Elihu Yale. And they explained to him -- Elihu was a man of deep conviction, and he had a lot of money; he was a very wealthy individual, and they were evidencing or kind of demonstrating to him some of the slide of Harvard already, in the first 80 years, and so they put themselves together, and Mr. Yale funded and founded a school in 1718 -- they called it Yale University. What was its founding? They added to their insignia not just the idea of *veritas* -- truth -- but also of Christ and truth in Him. They wanted to make sure that they didn't slide the way Harvard did.

If you went to both of those universities today, you'd probably get a fine education. You'd be quite employable. I seriously doubt you would meet Jesus from one of the professors. In fact, at the 350th anniversary celebration of Harvard, Steven Mueller, former president of Johns Hopkins University, bluntly stated, and I quote: "The bad news is the university has become completely godless." That's at their celebration. Larry Summers, a former president of Harvard, confessed, "Things divine have been central neither to my professional nor to my personal life."

How did that happen? How do you get a university that hires only Christian professors, how do you get a university that hires nothing but Christians in the faculty and staff, and move at 80 years to the point where today you wouldn't even recognize, they wouldn't recognize this mission statement? How do you do it at Yale? How do you do it at a score of other universities? And could it happen to our church? Yes. There's no question.

Andy Stanley says that vision leaks, and I think it's so true. Not only vision leaks, but mission drift is probably one of the most critical issues. I was meeting on a board at a university, and there was an individual being brought in and coaching us, and he made the statement: "The most important thing the Board of Trustees" -- that's their board -- "The most important thing that you have as an assignment is to make sure that your university, that you're a board member of, doesn't drift in its mission." He said, "There's absolutely nothing that comes close to that." Why? Because it happens. It happens. It happens not only to universities -- it happens in churches. And by the way, it happens in families. And that's why Joshua, when he was an elder man, gathered his nation together -- in particular, I think what he gathered together were the elders and the leaders and the judges and the officials. Why? Because he understood, "I'm gonna die." And he had some things that he needed to tell them, because it is the responsibility of the older generation to do their very best to make sure the next generation remains faithful.

So, for those of you who are younger today, listen in. But this message is for us. It's for those of us who are older. And the reason is, because Joshua teaches us the responsibility, and yes, the privilege that we have. We don't get the privilege of living life and retiring and traveling around -- we have an assignment, Joshua says. And the assignment comes in particular because no one lives forever. Joshua understood that. And so, you have to prepare for your departure. That's what he said. "I'm old. I'm advanced in years. One of these days I'm gonna join the cadre of the dead, and then you, you're gonna lead." And he understood something that sometimes maybe we don't take real seriously. In fact, in the Christian community, I'm not sure that we do. If you look at statistics, those who are dealing in the issues of will and probate and issues of estate, they will tell you -- Christians, 70 percent of the adults in this room do not have a will. That means 70 percent of you are not ready to die. Because if you do, you're gonna leave a disaster behind, and I'll probably have to help pick it up.

What do I mean by that? I mean that when somebody dies and their estate is not taken care of, and they haven't made the appropriate trust, and things aren't set up, number one, the government gets an absolute disproportional amount of money that they don't really need. But more importantly, from what I have witnessed -- and I've witnessed it way too many times -- is that everybody has a little bit different recollection of what daddy said. "Well, I think Dad said this." "No, I think Dad" -- "I think Grampa wants this." "No, this was Grampa's value system." And here's the net result. Not only does the government get more than they deserve -- more than just a few times, those kids don't speak to each other again, because money divided them. And Joshua understood -- "Guys, I'm gonna die. I've lived a great life. Fought a lot of battles. Man, I've grabbed my fingers around a lot of swords. But when I leave, there's a nation, and there's a God, and I want to make sure you walk with Him." Because his heart was for the people.

No one lives forever, and so, you have to prepare for your departure. I hope you live to be 90, 100 -- I hope some of you live to be 110. I mean, they're gonna make medicine pretty soon where you, you know, you're gonna be 150. I think I'm outta here a little bit ahead of that, I'm going to Heaven. Hopefully not in the next week, but I'm going. But I have things to do. And you do. Because there's a reason why Harvard slipped. It's because somewhere the board got lazy. Somewhere the board, and they selected a president, and they began to make this slide, and Yale did the same thing. And we could go down the list of Christian universities, ones who were founded. Our own Willamette was founded -- for what purpose? To educate missionaries. That was its founding. To educate missionaries to reach the Native Americans of this valley.

If you went to Linfield, just up the road, they used to hand out a theology degree. They had a degree. They had a whole theological department -- founded by a denomination. You're lucky to find a Bible on the campus. And what those universities experienced, your family can experience, unless you communicate a few things to those who walk behind you.

Joshua exhorts us a couple things. Number one, he says, "I want you to be clear about communicating their future options." There are two. Don't make life complicated, and don't let somebody blur the idea, it's like, "Yeah, there's a lot of options. There are many roads to Heaven." No no no no. There are two roads. "There are only two paths you can choose," Joshua says. The first one is the path of obedience. If you walk this way, it invites the blessing of God." He exhorts them, in verse 6, he says, "Be strong, be careful, to obey all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. And do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Don't associate with those nations that remain among you, and don't invoke the names of their gods, rather hold onto God. Love Him." Because if you do -- verse 3 tells us what the result of that is. "You yourselves have seen everything that the Lord your God has done to all of these nations for your sake. It was the Lord your God who fought for you." He sat down with them and said, "Guys, there's only two options. If you're obedient to God, there's gonna be blessing." It's not that there's not gonna be

hard times. He had hard times. He lost some people. He made mistakes. He wasn't perfect. But they were in the land of Canaan. They were in the Promised Land, and it was beautiful, and it was glorious. He says three times in this text alone, "It's a good land. It's productive, it prides everything. In fact, there's not been one nation that's come against us that has withstood our God. And if you're obedient, God will lead you that way."

One of my favorite quotes of Spurgeon is this one. He says, "God will not allow His children to sin successfully." Why? Because God is jealous for you. He's not jealous of you, He's jealous for you. And He longs for you to experience the totality and the fullness of the blessing of walking with Him. God may not have a property for you -- He does have a beautiful life for you. God may not have, you know, milk and honey flowing -- He does have promises for you. But if you don't walk with Him, if you're not obedient to Him, you quench the Holy Spirit. You set aside the blessings of God. "There are only two paths," Joshua said to his friends. "You can choose the path of obedience or you can choose the path of disobedience, and if you choose the path of disobedience, here's what you need to understand. It will become a slow and gradual decline."

Here's the danger of disobedience. It never bears its fruit quickly. What I mean by that is, you can disobey God, you can set the Word of God aside, you can reject your parents' faith, and your life doesn't fall apart the next day. If it did, people would probably come back quickly. But the fact is, you can walk away from God, you can close the Word of God, you can say -- "Ah, you know what? this really isn't the only way to live." And you can set it aside, and you can figure out -- and you will, if you choose that path -- that sometimes, actually, life gets better.

Like -- "Wait a minute -- the preacher's smoking something bad. He doesn't have a clue! I mean, I've rejected God's Word and my life is easier! The weight is off! I've gotta go back and tell the poor guy." It's true. More likely than not, your life doesn't fall apart overnight. Why? Because Satan is setting his hook. It's a slow, gradual decline. What are the steps? Number one, it's association. It's just coming into relationship. That's what he talked about here, he says, "Do not associate with those nations that remain among you." Well, what does it mean to associate? To hang out with. That's simple, right? In fact -- "I mean Pastor, if I'm gonna evangelize these people, I've gotta hang out with them. I gotta kinda be their friend." And so, we begin to associate. But it's not association with the purpose of hopefully sharing the gospel -- it's like, "Hey, let's become friends." And association leads to what I call entertainment. Not that you're being entertained, but you're beginning to discuss and entertaining their ideas. You're kind of processing their ideas with yours. And what happens in entertainment or discussion is that you elevate their life to the Word of God. And now you're saying, "Well, which one do I really like? Maybe I'll pick a little from either one."

The Nation of Israel almost inevitably took the next step. What happens after discussion or entertainment? Marriage. Marriage is where they begin to intertwine

their lives. Marriage is where they moved into a home and brought two gods. Two value systems. Two belief systems. There was a couple in our former church that came and I asked them one time -- they'd been there a little while, and I said, "Hey, what brought you to our church?" And they said, "Well, we got married." I said, "You got married and that brought you to the church?" And -- Mark was his name -- he says, "Yeah, the reality is, when we got married, I grew up a Mormon, she grew up an orthodox Jew, and we decided, 'Well, we can't really go to one of those. It would make them choose.' And so, we decided to go to the Baptist church." It was a weird way that God led them. It was strange, it was beautiful. They both got saved. Their kids got saved. I remember baptizing them -- actually dad did. And it was such a glorious thing. Here's the real honest truth -- it doesn't normally turn out that way. It doesn't. Typically, what happens is you marry in and your spouse, be it a husband or a wife, brings another god into the room. And then you start to part it, and then your kids start to choose, which god do they want, and the next thing you know, your family -- it's not even recognizable.

If you go back and look after marriage, next and finally comes adoption. What's adoption? You've changed gods. If you were a student of history, you could go back to virtually any one of these universities, and I bet within one or two leaders you could find where was the demarcation, where was the line, where did they shift? Where did they begin to entertain other paths to Christ? Where did they begin to shift their view of God's Word? Where did God's Word become not the authoritative plenary Word of God but the Scriptures that contain the words of God? What year did it happen? And you could go back and look at any one of these. They followed this path. It's a path of association. It's a path of entertainment and discussion. And then you marry.

What does it look like in a university to marry? You bring somebody on the board. You bring somebody in leadership that has a different god. What does it look like in a church? You bring a different teacher. You bring a different leader or different elder or different deacon that hasn't been vetted, that hasn't made a commitment to the Word of God, that maybe has a little off-slant. And the next thing you know, you're discussing things, and then you marry, you bring them into leadership. And the next thing -- you have a church that's not recognizable. You could look around the United States, and there's denomination after denomination, and Christian university after Christian university, that once had the banner *veritas* -- truth. And now somebody says, "The bad news is, they are godless." Here's a Christian university that now is being described by somebody as saying they have no God. They're godless. That's where disobedience leads you. And Joshua understood it. He said later in the text, "What starts off seeming benign, not really a big issue" -- verse 13, he says, "Then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become, number one, snares, they will be traps for you, whips on your backs, thorns in your eyes, until you perish."

That's the danger that the enemy works with. Bible says that the fear of man will prove to be a snare. At first it doesn't seem like you're fearing men, it seems like

you're actually serving them. Seems like you're trying to be open to ideas. It seems like you're trying to be kind. And then there's a snare that gets set, its hook that gets into the mouth. Joshua wanted to make sure they knew. "My friends, when I die you have two paths -- and every day you have to remind yourself which one am I on." Obedience is never perfection. Obedience is not that you're gonna have the perfect life. Obedience is a disposition that God is all authoritative, His Word is true, and to the best of my ability, I will surrender to it.

Disobedience is setting aside God as authority, dismantling His Word, deconstructing it, neutralizing it, so that I can make it on par with virtually any other faith, and say, "Oh, it's a good word, the Bible is a great word, along with many others." Be clear about communicating the future, and make sure your kids understand, "When I die, do know, you can play around with God all you want. There's are two paths. It's the one of obedience, and it's the one of disobedience."

And make sure, Joshua says, to be clear about the motivations for honoring God. In other words, there are benefits. And don't be ashamed of this, and don't think you're being manipulative. There are true, real benefits when you walk with God. Number one -- understand and help them see what God has done for you. Make sure you frequently tell the stories of everything that God has done for you. Joshua did that. He says in verse 3: "You yourselves -- you've seen everything that the Lord your God has done. How every nation that you have fought against, not one of them has withstood you."

Now understand, when Joshua's gathering these elders together, there's some of them that have never touched Egypt. There are some of them that don't know -- they heard about the exodus, they heard about those things, but they didn't live it. And it is your responsibility for those who have not seen the glorious work of God in your life, it's your responsibility to at some point lovingly, wonderfully telling them, "Let me tell you about the time that God showed up." And Joshua told them, "Let me tell you the time where I had a sea in front of me, and I was having Egyptian spears coming up my back," and I thought for sure Joshua was saying, "We're gonna die on this hill." "And God did something I've never seen in my life."

And I can only imagine that Joshua periodically sat them down and said, "Guys, there was a day -- man, I was down slugging it out. My hand was gripped around the spear. It had been around that spear so long I couldn't -- I literally tried to pull it off. Man, I couldn't get it off, and I looked up on the hill and we were being pushed back and defeated. And I looked up and I said, 'Get Moses' hands up!' And they lifted his hands unto the Lord," and Joshua says, "In that moment, the tide turned." Help them see what God has done for you. Help them understand the power and the reality of God. If all you have is to memorize Scripture and to put it in their heart, but you don't have any validation that it's become real for you that God has shown up in your life, then don't think it's gonna be a surprise that your kids are willing to turn in your faith and religion that seems terribly impotent for something else.

You see, if God hasn't answered prayer, if God hasn't shown up in your family, if there's not evidence of something real and powerful that God came down from Heaven and answered prayers and brought a prodigal home and healed somebody -- if there's not that story, then your kids are gonna wonder -- "Why? Why should I walk with your God? He seems terribly inattentive. Maybe God's busy with China and He doesn't have time for you." Joshua went over and over and over. "Can I tell you the time God showed up in Jericho? Can I tell you about God's kindness to me? I blew it in Ai. I did." And Joshua told them about the overreach, the laziness of his leadership. "God didn't discard me. He gently rebuked me, and He gave me another shot."

Be clear about the motivating factors for honoring God. Help them see what God has done, and help them love not just the truth of God's Word, but help them love God. There's a huge difference. I've gone to a couple of seminaries and taught at a couple, and every seminary that I know of has a huge challenge. And this is it-- they now how to graduate really educated students that know the Bible well. What every seminary will tell you is, what they're not as good at is graduating students that love God well. It's actually quite easy to learn to parse Greek verbs. It's another thing to love the Lord your God with all your heart. It's pretty easy to teach a church history. We can teach you some classes about leadership. Better to probably learn it in a local church. But it's a whole different thing to love Him. And to serve Him not because you're afraid of Him, but because you love Him.

Joshua tells them in this text, he says in verse 6: "Guys, I want you to obey all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Please do not associate, don't walk down that path of disobedience." Ah, verse 8. "But I want you to hold fast to the Lord your God as you have until now." He says the same thing, differently, in verse 11. "So be very careful to love the Lord your God, to love Him with all your heart."

Let's go back to verse 8 for a minute. I like the NIV most of the time. Here's a point I don't like their use of the term. They use the term "hold fast" -- the term actually is "cleave." Some of you have that translation. I like that, and the reason why is because, I think Joshua is reaching back into the memoirs of Moses when he's writing, and he says that a husband and wife will leave and cleave. And so, Joshua is reaching back and grabbing that language, and he uses that language why? Because he's trying to help them understand. It's one thing to love God. It's another to cleave to Him, to love Him, like a wife loves her husband, like a husband who loves his wife.

Every year when my wife has a birthday, I add one thing that I uniquely know about her. She's 62 years of age. I have 62 unique things about my wife. But my friends, as much as I'm infatuated with her, that's not what holds us together. I hope one day I get to write down the hundred things that I know about Kerri. We'll have a party. We'll just have a party for living that old. But that's not the bond. The bond is -- I love her. Not that I know things about her. It's that I adore her, I cherish her.

She's the most important person on this earth to me. And what Joshua is telling these dear friends, "Don't just know the Word. Don't just obey the Word. Love the One who gave you the Word. Because if you love Him, obedience will be easy. If you love Him, if you cleave to Him -- if you cherish God, if you see all the glorious and beautiful things that He's done for you -- obedience is not a chore, it's not hard, somebody doesn't have to hammer it into you! No, you delight in it."

Have you ever seen couples? And you can tell -- you can tell in a second. There are couples who stay together, and you know the only reason why they're together is, they just don't wanna live with the economic downfall of a divorce. The only reason they're together -- maybe it's the public shame. And then there are other couples. You look at them, and you go, "Good night. They've been married 50 years; they act like honeymooners." It's the sweetest thing in the world. It is, it's just glorious when you see a couple that -- they're just -- I mean, they don't even have to speak and the way they look at each other, you think, "Oh, they are loved." That's -- Joshua says, that's why he used the word cleave. Hold onto God that way. Because if you do, it will invite His blessing.

Finally, remind them of how much God loves them. Three times in this chapter Joshua uses the term -- 13, 15, 16 -- "This good land." Why does he use that? Well, I don't think it's an accident. If you go back and look at Moses' last message. Ten times in his last message he talks about the goodness of God and the good land that God has given to them. Romans 2:4 says, "It is God's goodness that leads to repentance." See, I'm convinced that every day the enemy's whispering in your ear, "God's not good, don't trust Him. God's let you down." And Satan has this amazing ability to remind you of all the prayers that God hasn't answered. And he'll throw that stuff at you ever day, and his passion is to convince you to doubt God, to give up on Him, to question him, accuse him. And so, Joshua's reminding them, "Please tell your children how much God loves them. Please remind them that it's the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. It is the goodness of God that gives us the motivation to be obedient, because I believe at the end of the day God is so, so good."

It is your and my responsibility to teach the next generation to love the Lord their God. It is your and my privilege, your and my absolute privilege and delight that we get to teach them about what God has done at our church, and we can tell them the moments where God has intervened and done miraculous things. It is our privilege to open up the Word of God and to declare the goodness of God and to help them see why. Because otherwise you and I are gonna die, and this church is gonna be led by different people, and if we don't pour into them what Joshua poured into his leaders, the nation can fall, the mission can slip, the vision can die.

You and I -- it may not have been given to us to be the president of a university, but my friends, you have a family. You have a business that you run. You have a church that you attend. And I dare say, it is your responsibility. It is absolutely your responsibility to bring together your family and to have these conversations with

them. Because one of these days you're gonna die. I have no idea if we're gonna be able to see earth from Heaven, but if we can, I want to look down upon this church. If God tarries, and I hope He doesn't -- I hope He wraps this whole thing up before the next election -- but if He tarries, and I die, I want to look down on this church in 50, 75 years and watch it be an absolute lighthouse to this city. And if that's the case, then you and I have some conversations that we need to have. And we need to tell those behind us -- "My friends, there's only two paths. You can choose the path of obedience. It invites God's blessing. Or you can choose the path of disobedience. It's slow. It lies to you. But it will ultimately be a snare and it will be piercing thorns in your eyes." Teach the next generation to love the Lord your God. It's your responsibility. Don't fail.

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