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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Joshua 23:1-6
Title of sermon: **God's Plan to Build a Dream**
Series: Blueprint - #2

Joshua 23:1-6 - NIV:

23 1 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, **2** summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: "I am very old. **3** You 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. **4** Remember 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. **5** The 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.

Commencement is one of those things that -- it's a word that is so associated with a certain event that we kind of don't even think of it outside of it. We have commencements at graduation. I've gone to a ton of those. And at every one of those graduations that I went to, there was a person there, a professional, somebody from that field who was talking about the vision of where those students were going into. Because -- the word "commencement" is kind of a new beginning, and every graduate, degree in hand, has a new beginning. Kind of like this home. We don't use the term, but they are commencing, if you will, bringing together a new beginning. This home's going to be a home to a family who is going to have new dreams and new experiences. They're going to celebrate Christmas in this home, and they're going to have all kinds of things, because they have a new beginning. There's a commencement about this home. What I do know about every home -- well, probably not every home, but this home -- is, it has a set of blueprints. And all of the folks who are coming here to this place build off of those blueprints. Nobody alters -- or it doesn't pass, it doesn't pass code. And so, as they're building this home, there's dreams, but there's a set of blueprints that defines what this house is going to look like. In a sense, that's also our lives. Every year. Every year when we start our year, it's a commencement. We have a new beginning. I love New Year's. I love New Year's goals. But every new year, in a sense, it is recommended, at least from the Scriptures, that you would have a set of blueprints.

Joshua, as we discovered, was leading his nation in celebration of what God has done, is now moving forward. And we're in Chapter 23 of the Book of Joshua. And there's a commencement -- it's a new beginning, it's not his. He's gonna pass away. And like a sage, wise leader, he understands that probably one of the most significant things you can do as a leader is to prepare those who will follow you, because they will have a commencement. And in this text, Joshua gives them kind of a blueprint of what it looks like. And I want to envision us hearing that from Joshua for this new year. What does he tell them? What are the blueprints? What are those things that you want to build this year on? Well, in verse 3, he starts in 23:3, "You yourselves have seen everything the Lord our God has done." Where does he begin? He begins with this challenge -- make sure God's lifted us this year. Make sure in everything that you do that you remind yourself. See, that was so important when Pastor Jeff talked about these altars, these memorials. What are they? They're reminders. They're ways that, when we see them -- I hope you have started to put together your pile, your memorial, your reminders. That's what Joshua did. He was a man of such incredible humility. Accomplished much, unbelievable leader -- but his first exhortation, the first essence, if you will, of a blueprint, is, make sure you lift God up.

Secondly, he tells them -- "I want you to obey God's Word completely." I don't find this a surprise at all, because wasn't it God who said to Joshua, way back at the beginning of his life, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth"? Well, Joshua picked that up. He heard it from God, because he passes this set of blueprints on to his friends. "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses." Joshua knew that. Joshua had defeats. He had victories. And every time he came back to those, they were reminders to him -- God's Word has said something. God's Word has exhorted him. God's word has guided him. And he told his friends, "When you build your life this year, when you put it together, make sure to obey God's Word."

I think sometimes obedience gets a bad rap. It's almost like we want to argue for the permission of our failures. Well, God's grace is always there. Absolutely. But you know the benefit of obedience? Psalm 112 talks about a man who walks with no fear of news of somebody coming. You know what the benefit of obedience is? You don't wake up in the morning and think, "Oh, Lord, I blew it yesterday." You know what the benefit of obedience to God's Word is? When you get your grades, you know they're your own. You see, obedience is really -- it shouldn't get a bad rap. Obey God's Word specifically this year, and what you will see is an incredible blessing from God as you live your life.

He tells them, third, "Make sure you exclusively commit your life to the Lord." This is great stuff. He says, "Do not associate with those nations that remain among you. Do not invoke the names of their gods." But here's a word -- and I love this -- "But *cleave* to the Lord." That word -- if you're married, you know that word. That's a marriage word. And Joshua's borrowing that word, and saying to us of this year, "Make sure you *cleave* to God." I want to frame it this way -- make sure this year is your highest intimacy and trust level ever with God. Make sure every day you remind yourself -- "God, I only go as far as you take me." Make sure you remind yourself -- "Apart from God we can do nothing -- but with God, we can do anything." You see, what Joshua knew is that all the battles that he won -- those were really God's. All of the victories that he celebrated -- those were really God. And when they blew it, and when there were problems in Ai, or whatever the case may be, Joshua knew -- "Ah, our loyalties have been led away." What's going to be your challenge this year? Well, it's going to be the challenge of every year -- idolatry -- the challenge this year is to trust other things, to let your attention be moved in another way. And Joshua says, "No. No. Let this year be a year of solidarity. Let it be a year where you lift up God, and you orient your heart to His Word, and you press your heart to God in intimacy and dependence."

Lastly, Joshua -- he's writing to his friends, and he knows -- these are cherished people that he's gone to battle with, and he's wrestled with. And also, they are people who have a promise that God has given to them. Joshua had a friend -- great friend, his name was Caleb. And Caleb's life, and Joshua's life, really echo this last point. Develop a vision that's bigger than you this year. When you write your goals, and when you set your course this year -- kind of like this home, I sure hope this family has a vision bigger than just them and their kids. You see, I hope they're gonna be bringing people in, and maybe even for a refuge, and maybe people will be coming into this home who need refreshment. Why? Because God says, "Develop a vision that is bigger than you." Probably no one in the Bible, from my perspective, could be a better example of this than Joshua's friend, Caleb. Caleb's 84 years of age. At 84 years of age, most are not asking for another battle. But Caleb did. He wanted more promise of God. And by the way, this wasn't for him -- this was for Othneil, his son-in-law. This was for his daughter. Caleb -- he's 84, he has everything that he needs. What was he about? Other people. What was he about? Othneil, who -- later in the Scriptures it talks about him, in Judges, how Othneil later became a judge in the land. Where did that vision come from to serve the people? I think it came from his father-in-law, who had a vision. Who understood that when you commence into a new year, you set a vision that is greater than you. He did that.

Let me read some of the end of the story. You might be wondering, how did this little battle turn out? If you look into Chapter 15, verses 13 through 17, God was faithful, and that 85-year-old soldier won another battle. How did it influence Othneil? He became a judge that served the nation. His daughter -- she asked her dad for property, for a promise that she could serve her people. I think that's one of the most exciting things about a new year, is that we can build into that new year not just something for ourselves. Imagine -- for all of us, 2020 was a hard year. I just talked to a person the other day who said it was the best year of their life! I was like, "Man, you are so rare -- it's awesome!" But for most, it was hard. And they don't look at 2021 as maybe anything better -- more challenges, unless you ask God for a bigger vision than yourself. You commit your heart's affection to Him and your obedience to His Word. What happens then? Well -- God's the limit on that one, and God has no limit. You see, that was Caleb's perspective.

We handed out to you this blueprint -- this little sheet. You say, "What do we put into it?" Well, I wanna tell you. Pastor Jeff talked to us about memorials. Kerri and I plan on putting all of the things into this that are memorials, things that God did this last year. Oh, I have an endless list. I do. One of them for me is our staff at our church. Through one of the most difficult years, two of our staff -- student ministry pastors -- this is the first year they've ever served in ministry. Can you imagine? Welcome to the ministry -- you've gonna have the roughest year of your life. But as I watched them grow, and as I watched our team work together, we had an unparalleled unity, commitment -- I mean, it was remarkable how God knit us together. And you know -- people were all over the place. They still are! And our staff just steadied the course. I think another one that is one of my just all-time absolute, kind of testimonies to God is, the church's finances. Probably most of my friends that I talk with in the pastorate are looking at 20 to 25 percent decreases. Staffs declining. Many have left. What's our church? We are incredible. It's just simply remarkable. In fact, for the Christmas gift this year, we are looking somewhere in the vicinity of over \$45,000 to bless the Police Department, to bless those who experienced the devastation of the fire. The church is absolutely, remarkably trusting God in their finances. So, what I want you to do is to take those and put those in here -- they become your memorial. This envelope is not just for the stories of what God has done -- let's add to it. It's a commencement. It's a new year. I want us to put in here, what are the visions that we want to ask God for this year? What are the things that we want to -- in our family, in our vocation, in our ministry.

Every year my sons and I, we exchange our goals. And those are some of the categories that we use every year. What are my personal spiritual goals? What are my goals for my family? What are my goals for ministry -- the staff and the church? Those are the kinds of things where I come to God and say, "God, I want another battle. I want another victory that you bring to us." So, let's use these. And what they're going to do is, they're going to stay at your house, and -- what I do, I look at my goals a couple of times a week, actually. Maybe you won't look into this twice a week, but I would love for us to periodically, quarterly, monthly look into this and say, "What have I asked God for? What am I expecting Him to do? What am I anticipating that He will do?" And I always love the passage in Ephesians that He will do exceedingly abundantly beyond anything we would ever ask. Why? Because we have a blueprint that is after His own heart.

Make sure we lift God up this year. Let's make sure that we commit to obedience to His Word as best we can. Let's commit to making this the best year of trust and intimacy with God. And when we do, let's ask Him for a vision that is bigger than us. We'll celebrate together, and we'll bring these back out, and we'll discover God's faithfulness to us personally and to our church.

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