

LEGACY

Joshua 24:14-24

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How do we evaluate how things are going in our country? I'll bet that if I took a poll this morning, most of us would say that more is going wrong than going right. But it's really hard to tell. I believe that we think that way because that's the message we receive from two sources. We get our information from the media, and it's actually in their interest to accentuate the negative. Bad news sells. Details of a corruption scandal or a tragedy make people tune in.

And our politicians build a case for their proposals by convincing us of how terrible things are and how desperately we need them and their ideas.

When good news happens, it rarely makes the headlines. One politician wrote an article earlier this year, claiming that in many of the areas we are most concerned about, great progress is being made. He makes the following claims. Whether you're convinced or not, they're thought-provoking. Terrorism is a frightening threat, but we don't know how many terror attacks have been thwarted by our intelligence and security apparatus since 2001. Probably many. Immigration is a serious and divisive issue, but immigrants continue to be a positive contributing factor in our economy, and powerful evidence of the degree to which much of the world envies our quality of life. We are

confronting our issues with racism and other forms of bigotry. Problems remain, no question about it, including environmental problems, but do we ever stop and realize how far we've come?

We worry about Zika, but think of the diseases we've eradicated. We complain about how busy we are, but do you ever marvel at our time-saving devices?

I sometimes worry that the legacy we're leaving to the next generation is a legacy of despair. That seems to be the attitude I pick up when I read and converse. "There's gridlock in Washington, there's no hope for peace in the Middle East, the economy is never going to get better for the middle class, we're leaving our children an impossible mess."

I am proposing this morning that we remove the language of despair from our vocabulary. Why? For one thing, it's unhelpful. It does no one any good for us to continually point out how bad things are. Secondly, it's unfair. Every generation deserves the opportunity to live in hope. Thirdly, it destroys our spirits. I don't want to spend the rest of my life complaining. I want to make a difference for good. I may not be able to solve the problem of world hunger — which is actually getting better, by the way — but I can contribute to hunger relief here. I can participate in Habitat for Humanity. I can tutor children. There's a lot I can do to improve the lives of those around me but not if I'm wallowing in despair. And finally, despair is unfaithful. Despair says, "God, we don't believe that you're powerful enough to do anything about this world any more." It's sacrilegious, it's idolatrous.

We don't have to put our heads in the sand, we don't have to put on rose-colored glasses. We see the problems of the world as they are, and we dedicate ourselves to

making a difference within our own sphere of influence. How else would we want to spend our lives?

Joshua is the leader who takes over from Moses. Moses dies right before the people of Israel enter the promised land. Joshua is the leader they need as they occupy their new land. He is a military leader, but also one who reminds them of who they are as God's chosen people. The Canaanites worship many gods, and he knows the Israelites will be tempted to take up their religious practices. At the end of his life, Joshua gathers people together for a solemn speech. He reminds the tribes of Israel of how God called Abraham away from the worship of many gods in the land of his birth to the worship of the one, true God who led him to the promised land and multiplied his offspring. "This is who you come from," Joshua says to the gathered tribes. "This is who you are." You are people who have been given this land, and given the commandments to follow. The first commandment says, "Have no other gods before me." "So you need to choose," says Joshua, "who you will worship and who you will serve." "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

One after another, they all make the same pledge. "We will worship God, too. We will." Joshua hopes they'll remember this speech, because he knows that deciding who you follow is a decision that is not just made once. It's a decision that's made every day, as people choose what to put at the center of their lives, how they will live, what values they will embody.

What legacy will we leave to the next generation? It is a choice we make with every decision we make, with every conversation, every vote, every act of charity, every donation. And that ability to choose, while an awesome responsibility, is also a gift of

freedom for which we can be grateful. Viktor Frankl survived the Nazi concentration camps and went on to write a book entitled, Man's Search for meaning. He wrote this:

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“Everything can be taken from someone, but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

“As for me and my house,” Joshua said, “We will choose the Lord.”

After Steve Jobs was diagnosed with cancer, his attitude towards life changed.

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[Think-Different.jpg](http://talentdevelop.com/WordPress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Steve-Jobs-Think-Different.jpg) Even though he had successful surgery and was in remission almost immediately, still he knew that he would never feel quite the same again. A brush with your mortality changes you. Many people have told me that. At that time when he was in remission, he said that he was more motivated than ever to leave his mark on the world. He was a visionary and a dreamer; he was also hard to work for and with.

When his cancer returned, this very private man agreed to have someone write his biography. He sat for hours of interviews. People who knew him were shocked that he was willing to answer so many personal questions. In his biography, he is quoted as saying, “I agreed to be interviewed because I wanted my kids to know me. I wasn't always there for them, and I wanted them to know why and to understand what I did.”

In material, commercial terms, Steve Jobs' life was a phenomenal success. He was creative, brilliant, and advanced the world of technology. But what about his legacy with people? Would you consider his life a success according to other values? Would

you consider your life a success if you trampled on people as you climbed the career ladder? If you consistently chose work over family? **[BACK TO TITLE SLIDE]**

I meet with a family to plan the funeral for their loved one. I ask them to tell me about the life of their spouse or parent. As I listen, what I'm hearing tells me about the values of that person. The saddest experience for me is when I hear, from the person closest to the deceased, "Well, there's really not much to tell." And I've heard this. I've heard people say, "Well, she liked bowling." I'm not looking to be impressed. I'm not listening for accolades, for resumes that mention graduating from prestigious universities or awards received. I'm listening for legacy. I love it when I hear, "She made every holiday so much fun." "You couldn't be in his presence and not laugh." "She had a terrible childhood but she never complained. She overcame so many obstacles." "He was the strongest and kindest person I've ever known." Those are legacy words. Those words tell us about someone's values. Sometimes you can tell that the person who died cared deeply about his community, or her church, or a particular cause.

Joshua said to the people of Israel, shortly before he died, "Who is your God?" "What is at the center of your life?" You see, you show your values by the way you live. Giving lip service doesn't do a thing. Saying you're a Christian doesn't make you a Christian. Living in the way that Jesus taught and lived is what it means to live the Christian life. I'm not calling us to perfection; it's not about that. It's about the choice, day in and day out, to live the values we claim. We are what we do, and what we do becomes our legacy.

James Baldwin wrote: [WORDS ON SCREEN: **“A country is only as good... only as strong as the people who make it up and the country turns into what the people want it to become... I don’t believe any longer that we can afford to say that it is entirely out of our hands. We made the world we’re living in and we have to make it over.”**]

Within the past year, I have attended three Eagle Scout ceremonies for young men in this church. A fourth is working on his project right now. Last Monday, I was at Avon Lake High School for Colin Wadsworth’s ceremony. He helped to procure a 3D printer for the school. I had never seen one before and found it completely fascinating. I learned that houses are being built now with 3D printers and that experiments are being conducted that will result in human organs being made with this technology. How dare we do or say anything that would thwart the enthusiasm of young people like Colin? And how can we possibly despair about our future when there are brilliant innovators trying to solve problems?

Two weeks from today we will commission over 100 participants for our senior high mission trip. What motivates them? In part, the legacy of those who have gone before. The knowledge that they will make a difference. The support of those of us who will be praying for them.

They are our best legacy. Working together, we can continue to grow people to serve God and others.