Next Is Now – Part 1

# The Steps of a Good Man

## (Numbers 27:12-23)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. It is so good to be back with you again this morning and I am excited about what God is doing in his church. In fact, we are launching a brand-new message series this morning called “Next Is Now” based on the transition from Moses leadership of the people of God to Joshua’s. This is so important because we all find ourselves in some form of transition, life itself is a journey from one point to the next, and so our effectiveness, our confidence, and our victories in this life are impacted by the voices that we are listening to.

Over the past few months, we have been following the path of the greatest pastor in the Old Testament. We’ve learned a lot about leadership, at least indirectly from Moses, because we have seen a lot of his struggles, the difficulties, the challenges, the failures, and the mistakes. We have been there with him walking in the wilderness and many of us are asking ourselves the same question Moses asked. “What does God want me to do?” You know, “What is God’s will for me?”

Answering this question is important, because the decisions we make today will determine the stories we tell tomorrow. And so, as we consider the life and the journey of Moses, we recognize and acknowledge that the choices we make matter, and you and I are the result of every decision that we have made in the past. In other words, who you become and what you are able to accomplish in your life, for the most part will be a direct result of the decisions that you make today.

As we turn to the Word of God in the book of Numbers, I want you to understand the context of where we are picking up. At this point in the text, Moses has led the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. The entire faithless, doubting generation that came out of Egypt had died in the desert except for Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. This entire generation that had been delivered from slavery, refused to believe in the promise of God, and therefore they remained stuck in their old ways because they were unwilling to embrace the new things that God was doing. And so, even though they talked about the presence of God in the tabernacle, even though they saw mighty miracles in the wilderness, they had become so comfortable with his provision that they were unwilling to walk in faith and therefore they were unable to embrace his promise.

When Moses sent out 12 spies into the Promised Land only Joshua and Caleb came back with a positive report. The other 10 men caused doubt and fear to rise up in the hearts of the Israelites by saying,

*“We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." And they spread a bad report among the Israelites about the land they had explored…” (Numbers 13:31-32).*

Because of their pessimism, and their negative outlook, discouragement crept into the camp. In the same way, if you listen to the wrong voices it will cause you to make bad decisions, because it will cause you to think that life is not worth living, and it will cause you to doubt that you will ever get out of whatever situation it is that you are in.

Discouragement is particularly painful in the life of the believer because as we travel from season to season it’s not just the challenges that we face, but the voices of unbelief that surround us that make walking in faith so difficult. In fact, it’s often as we are struggling to persevere that we see the unbelieving who seemed to be succeeding, their victories are flaunted in our faces becoming a source of continued frustration. And so, their apparent success becomes our agony, the sight of their prosperity our discouragement, but the Bible encourages us saying,

*“Don’t fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away” (Psalms 37:1-2).*

In other words, it’s just a season, and so we need to be careful not to allow a moment of discouragement to cause us to make a permanent decision based on a temporary circumstance.

The Holy Spirit speaking through the psalmist says, “Don’t trouble yourself, don’t become envious, don’t allow yourself to come to a conclusion about life prematurely, because if you just keep walking with God you will see that he will make everything all right. In fact, the Bible tells us,

*“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (Psalms 37:23-24, NKJV).*

In other words, you have got to persevere, you have got to stick with it, because it’s going to take a little while. That is what it means by steps, there is a process, and so the only way that you are going to get to your destination is by taking the necessary steps. You are not going to get there just because you saw it, you like it, and you want it. You are going to have to persevere, walking one step after another, not giving up, but continuing in faith and not by sight.

Now, in the Old Testament book of Numbers, we find Moses struggling with discouragement, this whole generation had died in the wilderness, and he’s wondering if only he had done this or if he had just done that. And so, he’s wrestling with the decisions, the failures, and the mistakes that he’s made in the past. If only he could speed up the process, no longer being tormented by what might have been, and hurrying to that great promise of a land flowing with milk and honey; but God tells him in Numbers chapter 27, verse 12:

*“Go up this mountain in the Abarim range and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes” (Numbers 27:12-14).*

In other words, there were consequences, there would be a price that was paid, and so God couldn’t allow his son Moses to reap a blessing when he was stumbling, failing, and messing up. But in his mercy, God would allow Moses to see the Promised Land, he wouldn’t die in his failures. God would take what is wrong and make it right, out of the heart ache and the pain of Moses failure he would be able to look up and see the glory.

And so, God would discipline Moses because he was his son, just as he would not let Israel’s sin go unnoticed, and none of Moses mistakes were in vain. You see, God’s holiness and integrity would drive him to his knees and Moses knew that he was loved by God. In fact, the Bible tells us in Proverbs,

*“The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Proverbs 3:12).*

We understand that there are consequences to poor decisions. And like Moses we must admit that many of us are not always the best decision-makers, we haven’t always walked victoriously through temptation. In fact, in a moment of honesty, I wonder how many of you have ever made a permanent decision based on a temporary emotion or situation? Don’t raise your hand, but I wonder if like Moses, you’ve ever lost your temper when you should not have? You see, life is full of decisions and a lot of times we end up regretting so many of the decisions that we have made.

In fact, you could say that leadership is all about decision-making and yet we are living in a generation that has more difficulty making decisions than ever before. Now, maybe it’s because there are so many more options today, kind of like choosing a movie on Netflix, but when I grew up you were lucky if there were even three movies available at the theater. However, today there are so many different options and because we’re afraid of making the wrong decision we often make no decision.

The problem is that no decision ends up becoming a much worse decision than an imperfect decision. You see, we may make a right or wrong decision, but God is more concerned about the motive behind the decision. It’s the motive that really matters to God because the Bible says in Proverbs:

*“All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord” (Proverbs 16:2).*

In other words, we have this incredible ability to deceive ourselves, to think that we are doing everything right, but the Lord says,

*“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jeremiah 17:9).*

And so, it is the Lord that considers our motives, because it is he who judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart and therefore the motive behind our decision-making is of great importance, because everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

And so, whatever you do, whatever decision you make, the apostle Paul said it so powerfully. He said,

*“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).*

In other words, whatever you do, you are doing it with the right motives when wherever you are, you are serving Christ there. Wherever you are working, wherever you are living, you want to do it all the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, because you want to do it with the right motives, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The overarching testimony of Moses life was that God made miracles out of his mistakes, successes out of his failures, and victories out of his struggles. And Moses recognized that next is now and so the motive behind all that he did was for the glory of God. Therefore, he was victorious in spite of the trials, the heart aches, the murmuring and complaining, and the bitterness of leadership. That’s why he could praise God with tears coming down his face, that’s why he could clap his hands and worship like he did, because everything he did was by faith and for the glory of God.

In spite of the rejection and misunderstanding of God’s people, in spite of their grumbling and complaining, Moses proved himself to be a true leader by being more concerned for the people then he was for himself. Now he was 120 years old, he’d led the people of Israel faithfully for 40 years, and knowing that his time was short he interceded for the people. In Numbers chapter 27, verse 15 he prayed,

*“May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd” (Numbers 27:15-17).*

And so, even though he was about to die, Moses didn’t think about himself, but his concern was about the future of the nation of Israel. As the shepherd of God’s people his greatest concern was that God would provide a spiritual leader for the people, and in verse 18,

*“The Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him… Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him” (Numbers 27:18-20).*

Now, Joshua had worked closely with Moses since they had left Egypt. He had accompanied Moses up on Mount Sinai to receive the law, he had led the army into battle, and he had served as Moses assistant in the tabernacle. And so, it’s no surprise that God chose him to take Moses place because he had endured the wilderness march, he had been one of the 12 spies that went into the promised land, he and Caleb had given a favorable report saying, *“We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it” (Numbers 13:30)*. And so, Joshua was a perfect successor to Moses and the Bible says in verse 22,

*“Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him…” (Numbers 27:22-23).*

Joshua had served Moses faithfully for 40 years and I am so thankful that God orders our steps. Isn’t that encouraging to know that you’re not wandering aimlessly, but that there is a path for you to walk and God is not making things up as you go?

I love how Moses trusted God in the process, even in those times when he prayed for God to make things go his way or not to have to endure some things that he needed to endure, but Moses was always moving toward what God had next. Sometimes he had to wait, sometimes he had to slow down, sometimes he had to go back and do it again, but Moses knew that God was working in him. And he knew what was coming, he knew that death was an appointment and not an accident. As the Bible tells us,

*“Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).*

Moses learned to trust God explicitly, he was given great privileges, but that also meant that he had greater responsibilities.

Therefore, it was because of his sin at Kadesh that God couldn’t allow him to enter the promised land. Moses had failed to glorify God, he’d acted in frustration, and instead of speaking to the rock, he struck the rock in anger and for that there were consequences. Now, instead of going into the Promised Land he would pass the care of the Israelites to Joshua. And Deuteronomy chapter 34 tells us that Moses would once again climb a mountain to meet with God. The Bible says,

*“Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land — from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it" (Deuteronomy 34:1-4).*

And so, God gave him the opportunity to view the Promised Land and he assured Moses that he would keep his covenant with Israel bringing them into that land flowing with milk and honey. Verse five says,

*“Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over” (Deuteronomy 34:5-8).*

Now, I know it seems like the end, but not all was lost for Moses, true life, eternal life was just beginning, and the Bible tells us that he did arrive in the Promised Land. Many centuries later both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus went up on a high mountain with Peter, James, and John when…

*“Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus…” (Luke 9:30)*

So, Moses talked to Jesus about his departure, about his Exodus from Jerusalem and all that he would accomplish on the cross. And so, Moses lived out all the days ordained for him, he died according to the word of the Lord, and honestly that should be our goal as well, because the Bible says,

*“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalms 116:15).*

As the Father pays attention to the death of every sparrow, he’s concerned not only with how we live, but also how and when we die. And so, for believers, death is an appointment.

Dana and I have become grandparents again this year, or two times this year if we squeeze Carter into this year’s calendar, and we have enjoyed many seasons of life, but I think this is really my favorite and certainly the most rewarding. It’s also a reminder that I am well past the halfway mark of life which I find to be meaningful because it causes me to start evaluating things differently. So many people live life wondering, “What does God want me to do?” But I think a much better place to start is to ask, “What does God want me to become?”

This is where Moses was, and he recognized that next is now. This is where Joshua was, that next is now. This is where the Israelites are, that next is now. And this is where we are, next is now. And so, you may or may not have passed the halfway point of life. You may have more days in your future than are in your past. But I hope that you will consider things a little differently now. Not so much about what you have done, not about the great things you have accomplished, but faithfully serving your brothers and sisters or spouse, considering others whom you have helped to guide to be followers of Christ.

Next is now and so I don’t want to set out to do, as much as I want to be faithful to Jesus in the now. It is a change of perspective, thinking about the ‘who’ long before the ‘do’, thinking about why before the what, because it’s our motives that matter to God.

When you want to do something big in the future, be who God calls you to be today. If you want to do something big for God, do something small today, because the Bible says,

*"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much” (Luke 16:10).*

And so, when you are faithful with little, God will trust you with much. And when you look at the teachings of Jesus, God’s will for you is more of a someone than a something. It’s not so much about career, as it is about people. He says, love God and love people, that is the greatest command. That’s a reflection of who we are as followers of Christ.

That’s why when our desire is to be conformed to the image of Christ, we don’t have to worry about the future, because he will take us there step-by-step, not toward a destination out there, but in that direction. The Bible tells us in Proverbs that it is God who directs our steps.

*“A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9, NKJV).*

And so, if you are seeking to become the right who, God will help you to choose the right thing to do. If you are driven by the right why, if you have been called according to his purpose, God will lead you to do the right what.

And so, whatever you do, wherever you live, whatever your current status is, do it all for the glory of Jesus. You see, he will lead you to the right do, when you get the right who. It’s not about us, it’s about us conforming to the image of Christ, as the Bible says,

*“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son…” (Romans 8:29).*

And so, God will lead you and guide your steps. And when he does, he will do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20). And so, we don’t need to freak out, worrying about what’s out there, because next is now, we just need to be faithful with what’s right here. Let’s pray!

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

September 13, 2020

(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*