

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today's message ties in with last week's. Last week, as you will recall, the message was called "Sent Out." God has given us his Word. He has drawn us close to Christ. God has taught us that the answers to our biggest needs are not found inside of us. The answer lies outside of us. Our salvation comes not from us, but from Christ Jesus. We cannot muster a large enough payment for our sin. The payment is outside of us and consists of Jesus shed blood and life sacrificed. Strength is not in us, but outside of us in God. Truth. Peace. Purpose. All found outside of us.

We have learned this. We believe this. Now God sends us out to lead others to look "out" and see the truth that saves us in Christ Jesus. In other words, we received the encouragement to share the good news of Jesus with others.

I think we're familiar with that theme. But today I want to take a similar thought, but we're going to go in a different direction. When we talk about sharing the Gospel... when we think about the Kingdom of God growing, we usually think about mission work and going out. It needs to expand. It needs to go to new homes, new places, new communities. Sharing the gospel is often a *spatial* thing for us. It's now *here*, and it needs to go *there*.

This is true, and this is important, and that's why we spent a whole sermon talking about it last week. But today I want you to ponder this concept. Not only does the word of God need to be shared spatially. It needs to be shared temporally. By that I mean that the Word must be passed down to the next generation. And they must pass it to the one after that. If the Word is not successfully passed down from generation to generation, the gospel is lost.

Perhaps you noticed in the bulletin the Worship Focus which says, "We are one generation away from completely losing the gospel!" When you read that, did it sound alarmist? Did you think, "Really? I didn't think things were that bad!" What I meant with that statement, though, is that if no one in our generation sees to it that the next generation is receiving the gospel, then in just one generation, the gospel is lost.

So here is the big idea: Not only does God call us to share his gospel around the world (spatially), but he calls us to share the Word with the next generation. So let's think about that. What will it take to make sure the next generation has and holds and shares the gospel of Jesus Christ? To help us answer that question, let's turn our attention to Numbers 27:12-23.

**Setting:** The time is roughly 1500 BC (so, 2500 years ago.) Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt after the 10 plagues. He led them to the promised land. But they people refused to enter the land, so God sentenced them to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness... just enough time for that generation to die off, and a new, more obedient generation to take their place. (By the way, we can't just write off that rebellious generation as enemies of God. Apparently there was repentance in the old generation, because they apparently did pass on the stories of God's faithfulness to the next generation. When it was time to enter the land, that next generation was ready to obey God!) So... 40 years are up... it's time to enter the land, and here's what happens:

**Numbers 27:12-23** Then the Lord said to Moses, "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.” (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)**

So God tells Moses to climb a mountain. He allows him to look out and see the Promised Land. But Moses himself will not enter it. The reason is because of an earlier act of disobedience. The people ran out of water, and they were complaining against Moses. God told Moses to gather the people before a certain rock. He was supposed to speak to that rock and water would begin to gush out of it. The people would see that God had provided and praise him for his love and faithfulness.

But that’s not how it played out. Once the people were gathered, Moses said to them, **“Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.** Instead of giving them a taste of God’s love, Moses gave them a taste of God’s wrath. Instead of giving glory to God, Moses took glory for himself. (Note who was doing this: “We”: Moses and Aaron.)

God wasn’t happy: **“But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”**

So that’s why Moses will not enter the land.

So now God is keeping that promise. He allows Moses to see the promised land, but he will not enter it. Now put yourself in Moses’ shoes. You’re an old man. You’ve just been wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. The people complained against you all the time. God has told you you’re about to die. You see the land you’ve always dreamed of, but you can’t enter it. What’s going through your mind?

There are all sorts of reasons to grumble and be angry. There’s every reason to be focused on yourself at this point, isn’t there? **He’s about to die!** Maybe his next words will be about that, and about his desire to be with the Lord... or bargaining for more time. **He won’t enter the Land...** maybe his next words will be a plea for God to change his mind, or anger that God hasn’t changed his mind. **His own sins were the reason.** So maybe he’ll revisit that incident with sorrow or regret. Nope. None of that.

**Moses said to the Lord, “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.”**

Of all the things Moses could have been thinking about, not that he is concerned about the next generation. Moses knows these rebellious people need a faithful shepherd who will lead the people on the straight and narrow. Knowing he won’t be there to lead them any longer, Moses goes before the Lord with that concern... that the people have a godly leader to take his place.

Maybe we could pause here and ask the question: Is this always our concern? Are we focused on the next generation? Are we concerned as we should be that they will have the spiritual leadership that they need? Are we giving them the time and training they need to grow in their walk with the Lord? Or do we sometimes get consumed by our own lives... our work, our issues, our finances, our relationships? Can you imagine the horrible consequences if we don’t reprioritize and refocus our attention to make sure that the next generation receives the Word of the Lord, and

godly leaders to lead them? The Word of God is literally lost in one generation. We endanger our children and grandchildren and their eternal futures. The stakes are high!

If we as individuals or as a church haven't given this adequate attention, today is the day for change. Now is the time to repent. As with all our sins, we grieve over them. We turn from them. We place them before God. And in his mercy he promises that he removes the guilt of our sin. He gives us his peace. He makes us his children. He creates in us a new heart and mind. And our new heart and mind is one that, like Moses, is concerned that the next generation will be well trained and have godly leadership.

When Moses brought this concern to the Lord, what happened?

**So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in." 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, as the Lord instructed through Moses.**

Before Moses dies... before he leaves this earth, he makes sure the next generation will ready. How? By making sure the next generation of godly leadership is in place.

1. God chose the man. Joshua. Truly, Joshua's preparation began long before this. He knew the word of God. His faith was strong. (Remember he was one of only two spies that trusted in God to give them the land... before the 40 years of wandering.)
2. Lay hands on him and commission him.
3. Stand before the priest.
4. He receives some of Moses' authority, so the people understand that he is taking Moses' place.
5. He is directed to reach decisions by inquiring of the Lord.

We too need to concern ourselves with preparing the next generation. We need to share the word with them, and prepare them to be leaders. We need to be mentoring and coaching. We need to have our eyes open to the up and coming leaders God is providing. This is one of our primary tasks! We won't be here forever. Who will take our place?

Okay, so some ideas. How do we make this happen. As I gave this some thought, I reached the conclusion that by God's grace we as a church are already doing a lot. But could we do more? And the challenge is also for each individually: what is your role in training the next generation? So here's how we do it:

1. We run a Christian day school. 3 year olds through 8<sup>th</sup> grade can come here and learn about Jesus. What an important thing this is! Support our school with your time. Support our school with your offerings. It's expensive to run our school, but it's worth every penny. The cost of every student in our school is subsidized by our congregation. When you give offerings, you are helping train the next generation!

Now, I'm not saying that every child in our church must go to our school, or we're not showing a concern about the next generation. But if you don't send your kids to our school, are you going to do as much as our school does to train them in the word of the Lord? It's vitally important.

2. Sunday School, youth group, VBS: Bring your kids. Teach! Support the program.
3. NELHS
4. As a church that belongs to a larger church body, we help support a worker training system that prepares the next generation of pastors and teachers.

And what can you do individually?

5. Be in the word daily, and share the word daily with your kids, or with whatever children are in your life.
6. Home devotions are vitally important.
7. Encourage and mentor those with leadership potential!

Can you envision what it would like if every single one of us were totally committed to taking every measure possible to ensure that the next generation both receives the Word of God and has godly leaders in place when we're not here anymore? Of all the gifts we could give the next generation, isn't this one the greatest? May God move our hearts today to redouble our efforts and see the importance... not just of sharing his word far and wide (spatially), but sharing his word "long" so it will be here for generations to come! Amen.