

Four Wonderful Discoveries

by Warren Wiersbe

As leaders, we must recognize that we are not alone, second in command, and on holy ground, and seek guidance from God in all aspects of our ministry.

Duration: 41:37

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:8, Joshua 1:5, Joshua 1:17, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 43:2, Acts 23:11

Topics: "Gods Providence", "Faith And Trust"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the providence of God and how He prepares and guides His people. He emphasizes that if God has led someone to a particular church or ministry, it is because He has already prepared them for it and they have already won the battle. The speaker shares four discoveries that Joshua made while doing his job, including the realization that he was not alone, that he was second in command, that he was on holy ground, and that he had already won the battle. The speaker encourages all those serving the Lord to make these same discoveries and to trust in God's providence.

Transcript

Amen, thank you. It's always a delight to be at this conference because of the enthusiasm and the love for the Lord and the desire to win people to Jesus. When I tell people about this conference, they don't believe me, but let's keep it that way.

When you can explain what is going on, God didn't do it. So just leave it in the realm of the unexplained and thank God for it. Some of you came to the conference very grateful to leave town because when you get back, there are going to be some problems that have to be faced and solved.

That's why you're there. Pastors phone me and share their burdens or write me and I remind them of what Paul wrote to Titus, this is why I left you in Crete, to straighten out the things that need straightening out. That's why you're there.

It's always too soon to quit, particularly when you can read passages like Joshua chapter 5, verse 13. We want to go back in time and space and learn from Joshua. Joshua chapter 5, verses 13 through 15.

It's night, the next day Jericho will be attacked, and Joshua is doing what every good leader does. He's out reconnoitering. He's out checking out the situation.

You know, that's what you are. You're an overseer. Pastors have to be able to see through things and see around things, and sometimes it's good to have one blind eye and one deaf ear.

Just don't believe everything you see and everything you hear. But a pastor is an overseer. The minister of music is overseeing the choir and the minister of youth is overseeing the young people.

It's good when other folks are sleeping to be awake and out checking things out. It came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho that he lifted his eyes and looked and behold a man stood opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, are you for us or for our adversaries? And he said, no, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, what does my Lord say to his servant? Then the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, take your sandal off your foot for the place where you stand is holy. And Joshua did so. Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel.

None went out and none came in. And the Lord said to Joshua, see, I have given Jericho into your hand. It's King and the mighty men of valor.

I don't know that I would want to be in Joshua's shoes. Joshua followed a great man. A couple of times in my ministry I have been called to follow some very, very great people.

And Joshua was the successor to the man to whom God spoke face to face. Moses didn't have to consult the commentaries. He wrote the books that the commentaries are written about.

Moses didn't have to wonder what's going to happen next. My Bible says he made known his ways to Moses. Oh, what a great thing it is to learn the ways of God.

And so Joshua was following a great man who'd done some great things. Moses was a tremendous liberator, leading the people out of Egypt, and a great legislator, giving them the laws of God, and a great leader. And now Joshua was facing test number one of his ministry, the conquest of Jericho.

And so that night, while he was out checking things, he made four very wonderful discoveries. And I would hope that each one of us, pastors, pastors' wives, ministers of music, and your wives and children, I would hope that all of us, youth workers, church building superintendents, what would we do without them? I'm thinking of starting a new organization for church janitors. They need encouragement.

I'm going to call it premise keepers. But all of us who are serving the Lord in one way or another need to make these four discoveries. I wish I'd made them sooner.

Discovery number one, when Joshua was out doing the job he was supposed to do, he discovered that he was not alone. Have you ever stopped to consider the loneliness of leadership? Our people don't think about this. I'm sorry.

Some of them do. Some of them don't know the loneliness of leadership. The leader is making plans that involve people.

The leader is making decisions that involve lives. And one day the leader will stand before God and give an account of those decisions and that leadership. There's loneliness to leadership.

When Harry Truman put on his desk that little motto, the buck stops here, he knew what he was talking about. And when Harry Truman said, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen, he knew what he was talking about. Joshua was called to be a leader.

And that's lonely. He wasn't walking out there around Jericho with his lieutenants, a committee. He was out there alone.

And there's many a time when you have had to be alone. You've said to your wife, I'm going back to the church. I'm going to the study.

And on your knees before God, with your Bible open, you've prayed. Nobody knew anything about it. When Campbell Morgan was a young preacher, he was immensely popular.

And one day, one night, he was sitting in his study at home. And God said to him, not audibly, but the way we hear God speak to us in our hearts. God said to him, Morgan, are you going to be a popular preacher or my spokesman? And Morgan said, I wrestled.

And then I went to my file and took out all of my precious outlines that had been listened to by so many people, and I went to the fireplace and I put them in and burned them. And said, Lord, I will be your spokesman. We wouldn't have known about that except he told us.

Joshua discovered he was not alone. Now, I think he already knew this because Moses had told him. Listen to what Moses said when he ordained Joshua.

Then Moses called Joshua, says Deuteronomy 31 7, and said to him, in the sight of all Israel, be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. As Bob Cook used to say, small thought here, you ever stop to think that when you and I preach the Word of God and pray with people and pastor people, we're helping them to claim what God has planned for them. That's an awesome thing.

And the Lord, he is the one who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Do not fear, nor be dismayed. Well, with an ordination sermon like that, you know that God is with you. And then in Joshua chapter 1, we read just about the same thing.

God says to him in verse 5, no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

That's great. Be strong and of good courage. Why? Because I'm with you.

The people were anxious for that Joshua knew about this in chapter 1 of Joshua. Verse 17, just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses.

Great to have people like that, isn't it? Who encourage you. He discovered he was not alone. God promised to be with him.

Moses said he'd be with him. The people said God be with you. Joshua said it himself.

And God has said this to us. I suggest sometime you take your concordance and work your way through Scripture and find out the people to whom God said, I'm with you. I'm with you.

I'm not going to leave you. I'm not going to forsake you. He said it to us, Hebrews 13, 5. The Lord said to us, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

When Jesus was about to be born, God said, call him Immanuel, which means God with us. Now, I know my heart a little bit, not as much as I should. Jeremiah warns me, you don't know your own heart, but I know my heart a little bit.

And God's name ought to be God against us because I know how sinful I am. But no, it's God with us. That's the beginning of Matthew.

Immanuel, God with us. You get to the end of Matthew and Jesus is saying, lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age. And so here's the first discovery all of us have to make as leaders.

We are not alone. I suppose all of us at one time or another have found our way to the book of the prophet Isaiah. And if we haven't read it for ourselves, we've read it for other people.

Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed. I am your God.

I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand, Isaiah 41 10.

Down in verse 13, for I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, fear not, I will help you. Chapter 43 of Isaiah, if you have not yet preached the fear nots of the book of Isaiah, study them and preach them. Here's another one, 43 2. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor the flame scorch you. And that's why he can say in verse 1, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

If you're going to be a leader in spiritual things, you're going to have battles. And it can be very lonely at the front, can be very lonely in the trenches, misunderstood, criticized. When you came to the church, there were people who just hugged you, and a year later those same people stabbed you.

Because while they were hugging you, they were feeling for a soft spot. The more I study the Apostle Paul, the more I admire that man. I admit he might have been a bit difficult to work with, but oh, what a man.

He goes to Corinth, the home of the philosophers, the academy. I once heard Harry Rimmers say that a philosopher is a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there. And the trouble is, he finds it.

Paul went to Corinth with the gospel. He went to Corinth determined to know nothing except Jesus and him crucified. And the going was tough.

Acts chapter 18, they kicked Paul out of the synagogue, and verse 9 says, now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night. Does God ever wake you up and talk to you? Do you ever have songs in the night? God spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, do not be afraid, but speak and do not keep silent, for I'm with you. No one will attack you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city.

And so he continued there a year and six months. Now, if he'd had his theology messed up, he would have said, well, if you have all the people, I'll move on, you take care of them. No, no.

The God who ordains the end ordains the means to the end, and we are the means to the end. So for 18 months, Paul kept preaching and praying. Years ago, Laman Strauss said to me, the secret of ministry is preach and pray and plug away.

That's true. Because he knew that God was with him. Well, this happened again.

The Apostle Paul, chapter 23 of the book of Acts, he's being interrogated before the council, and they've got a riot on their hands. That doesn't look too good. But in chapter 23, verse 11 of Acts, but the following night, how odd that God comes at night.

The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, be of good cheer, Paul. For as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome. I'm with you.

And they put Paul on a boat. They should have listened to Paul. They didn't.

Acts chapter 27. And here you have a two-week storm. And Paul warned them not to go.

But they went anyway. Acts chapter 27. Paul gives them a word of encouragement in verse 22.

And now I urge you to take heart. For there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of God, to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, do not be afraid, Paul.

You must be brought before Caesar. And indeed, God has granted you all those who sail with you. See, God was with him.

Isn't it great to know that God's with you in your ministry? God's with you in the storms? When you get to 2 Timothy chapter 4, you find the Apostle Paul saying an interesting thing. The last letter he wrote, verse 16 of chapter 4, at my first defense, no one stood with me. How about that? He addresses 26 people by name in Romans 16.

Nobody of that group was there. Can you imagine the great Apostle Paul, who's standing trial for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and no one stood with him. And so if your best friend forsakes you, or if the chairman of the board denies you, or if half of the flock departs from you, remember Paul.

At my first defense, no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged to them, but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. That's all we need.

I like to read biography and autobiography because it tells me about real people. And I've learned in these years of reading that real people come to crossroads and they feel like they're standing alone. And when you're a Christian, you know you're not alone.

That's the first discovery we have to make. Go to that. He discovered that he was second in command.

Now if anybody was equipped to be a successful leader, it was Joshua. Let's just tick off all of his wonderful characteristics. He was born in slavery.

That's a good place to get a leader. He knew what it was to suffer. He knew what it was to be identified with people who suffer.

We have far too many pastors today who are elevated from and isolated from people. They're invisible during the week and incomprehensible on Sundays. Here's a man who was born in slavery and knew what it was to suffer.

He knew what it was to work. Anybody who has never taken orders should not give orders. Jesus said, first you start as a servant, then you become a ruler.

Well done, good and faithful servant, I will make you ruler. So he knew what it was to suffer. He'd been a servant for 40 years or more.

Moses' servant. Carried Moses' baggage and ran Moses' errands and just did humble things for Moses. Moses was his mentor.

Joshua sometimes in those years asked some questions that were interesting and Moses answered them. And Moses went up in the mountain and Joshua would go up in the mountain and Moses went out to his tent of meeting and Joshua went out there. What a tremendous privilege.

He'd fought some battles and won. He'd learned how to trust God for victory. When the people of Amalek attacked the Jews after the Exodus, Moses said, I'm going up on that hill with the rod of God and with Aaron and Hur and you get down here in the valley and you fight and we're going to pray.

And Joshua was down there leading that army and every once in a while I'd look up and sure enough, there's Moses. I tell you, he knew how to trust. He was a man with courage.

I think if I'd been out that night and seen somebody standing there with a sword, I would have said, well, hmm, that's interesting. Goodbye. Now Joshua knew there's only two camps.

You're either for us or against us. He didn't say, now, where are you on this spectrum? He didn't say, now, what is your latest thought about Israel? No, no, no. He said, are you for us or against us? I like that kind of a leader.

And he had courage. But he had to learn he was second in command. Now hear me.

God has given you training and education and gifts. Now those are different. We get training so we can make a living.

We get education so we can make a life. But we get gifts so we can make a ministry. And God says, now, I equip people different ways.

I train people different ways. Some I put through the usual courses of school. Some I don't.

Some I call young in life. Some I don't. But the important thing for any of us, regardless of our mentoring, our experience, our gifts, our training, the most important thing is that we're at the feet of Jesus.

Jesus said, I'm not here to take your orders. I am here to give the orders. It's a marvelous day in the life of a leader when we realize we're second in command.

This encourages me because I don't know of a preacher, missionary, Christian worker who at some point doesn't feel like he hasn't got it, she hasn't got it. And the older I get, the harder it is to preach. And the harder it is to write.

And if you have the idea, young preacher, that as you get older it's going to be easier, I've got news for you. It's not. It's not.

And yet, one thing is true. We can always come to the feet of Jesus. I keep reminding myself of what Jesus said in John chapter 15 in verse 5. Without me, you can do nothing.

He didn't say without me you're handicapped, without me it'll be a little difficult. No, no. He said even what you do will be zero.

Robert Murray McShane, whose life you ought to read, wrote to a missionary friend and said, remember, it is not great talent that God blesses, but great likeness to Jesus. And over these 50 years of ministry, nearly, I've seen some very talented people go right down the tubes. You know why? They didn't have time to be at the feet of Jesus.

They were first in command. I've seen, and it pains me to think of it, Christian workers whose homes have gone to shreds. They didn't have time to be at the feet of Jesus.

They thought they were first in command. Oh, no. Second in command.

I don't want to follow a leader who's not following Jesus. I don't want to submit to a leader who hasn't submitted to Jesus. Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ.

And if my pastor is following Christ, I'll follow him anywhere. But I'm amazed as I, oh, have lunch with this one and breakfast with that one and chat with the other one, and you ask the simple question, tell me about your devotional life, where are you reading in God's Word? What's he saying to you? And there's a silence, and the face goes down, and then they look up and say, well, I guess I'm not reading anywhere. How do you expect to fight the battle? How do you expect to get your orders? Too busy.

Doing what? He learned he was second in command. And so tomorrow morning when you wake up, remember now you're second in command. Twice in his ministry, at least in the book of Joshua, Joshua forgot he was second in command and got himself in trouble.

AI. After they'd conquered Jericho, here was AI. What's AI? AI was so small the zip code was a fraction.

You live in a town like that, is that it? And the experts came. He had expert advice. He had the statistics.

I'm scared to death of statistics. People are building their church ministries on statistics. And I'm scared of it.

You can sell hamburgers that way. You can't peddle the gospel that way. And they came back and said, Joshua, that's such a small place.

They just sent a small crew up there. And Joshua didn't stop to say, excuse me, I got an appointment. And they went to AI and lost.

He forgot he was second in command. And one day a group of crummy looking people walked into the camp. And oh, we're from a far away city.

And look how moldy our bread is. And look how our shoes are worn out. They were just lying, deceiving, Gibeonites.

And Joshua consulted with his leaders, but he didn't consult with Jesus. And you know what happened? He had to go out and fight a battle to defend the enemy. There's a third discovery that he made that night.

That he was not alone and that he was second in command and that he was on holy ground. I have to kind of smile when I read that. Because he said, he's a Jericho.

That's pagan ground. Jericho was a wicked city. And these people were wicked people.

They were idol worshippers and they had religious ceremonies that were grossly evil. Jesus said to him, better take your shoes off, Joshua, because you're on holy ground. If you're God's servant doing God's work, every place you go is holy ground.

That includes hotel rooms, motel rooms. Some years ago, I attended a convention. I won't name the group.

I found out later on that more pornographic movies were watched by the delegates to this religious convention than by any other convention that had ever come to that hotel. They forgot they were on holy ground. When you're looking at the magazines in the airport, you're on holy ground.

When you're cruising the channels, you're on holy ground because you're God's servant. And wherever we go, we're on holy ground. Moses had been up on the mountain and seen God.

Joshua had walked with Moses. He knew what holy ground was all about. There is no such thing in the ministry as secular and sacred.

There is no such thing. There is the holy and there's the unholy. And Moses had tried to teach all the people the difference between the holy and the unholy in their diet and in their dress and in all of their conduct.

And sometimes God's leaders say, well, now this is not really too bad, but are you on holy ground? It's a wonderful thing to be on holy ground. The Bible calls this integrity. An integer is a whole number.

A fraction is a part of a number. Integer, wholeness, integrity, wholeness. No part of our lives that slips off to some other territory.

It's all holy ground. David prayed in Psalm 51, wash me. That's a good prayer.

But God said to Isaiah, you go tell those Jewish people, wash you. You clean up your lives. In fact, Paul wrote and said, having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves.

God's not going to send an angel down to straighten out my CD collection or my video collection or my magazine rack or my library. I have to do that. And when Paul was in Ephesus, the saints got so convicted, they burned their books.

You're on holy ground. Eight times in scripture God says, be holy, for I am holy. John 3, 16 is only there once.

Eight times, be holy, for I am holy. There was a fourth discovery he made. He discovered he was not alone.

He discovered he was second in command. He discovered he was on holy ground. And he discovered he had already won the battle.

Oh, that gets to me. Our God is such a great God. I love to study the providence of God.

Providence means he sees beforehand. Provideo. He sees beforehand.

And you know, if God led you to that church, he's prepared you for it and it for you, and it may seem like some real struggles and battles, but he put you there because he saw beforehand. You've already won the battle. These are tough days.

We have a strange generation coming along. I'm not one of these elders that goes around criticizing the younger generation. I'm going to be very careful because we raised them.

But they're living in an atmosphere that's different from the atmosphere I grew up in. When I grew up, there was right and there was wrong. A young man came to me at Moody Church one day and said, you believe in absolutes, don't you? I said, yes, I do.

He said, there are no absolutes. I said, does that include the statement you just made? Because if it includes that statement, there are absolutes because that statement's not true. What? He said.

You see, we have a thoughtless generation today. They have not thought from point A to point B. And whatever works is good, and whatever you get away with, the first commandment is thou shalt not be caught. But the first promise is there are no consequences.

We have a whole generation of people who do not believe in absolutes and who do not believe in consequences. They will. They will.

Hard to minister to people like that. But Jesus said to Joshua, I have given Jericho into your hand. Not I might if you're a good boy.

Not if you earn enough brownie points. No, no, no. I've won the battle.

My Bible in John 10 says that when Jesus, the good shepherd, calls his sheep, he goes before them. That means that when I walk into that committee meeting, he's there. He's gone before me.

When we have that congregational meeting and some of the sanctified obstructionists have shown up, the Lord got there before them. Oh, how wonderful he is. He goes before us.

And Joshua learned that he had already won the battle. Now, God does not always give to me the detailed plans he gave to Joshua. I've learned something about the will of God in these later years.

You don't have to agree with it. I've learned that I need other people to help determine the will of God. My wife and I have to talk about things and pray about them.

When I was back to the Bible and I'd sit down with our directors and we'd have some decisions to make, I'd discover an interesting thing. The will of God is something like a jigsaw puzzle. And I'd be sitting there and I'd say, now, man, here's what I see we probably ought to start doing.

And I put down my two pieces of the puzzle. And one of the men says, you know, I've been praying about that. And he puts down his piece.

And after an hour or two of prayer and talking, we see the picture. We need each other. The American approach to individual Christianity is not biblical.

We are sheep, and sheep flock together. And we need shepherds. I thank God for some of my friends with whom I can chat and pray.

They teach me. They help me. And Joshua discovered he had already won the battle.

So how did he claim that victory? By faith. That's what Hebrews 11 says. By faith, the walls of Jericho came down.

That's great. By faith. And the plan God gave to them, it seems foolish.

When are we going to learn that God uses the weak and foolish things to confound the mighty? As we travel this country, we get into some churches. And you wonder, what is God doing here? It's just one blessing after another. And yet they're just foolish enough to believe God.

And that's not foolish at all. That's the wisest thing you can do. Well, here are four discoveries I wish I had made a lot sooner.

But in these years, I'm going to have to keep them in mind. I'm going to have to remember that I'm not alone. That Jesus is always with me.

And that being the case, I am on holy ground. So I've got to be careful to walk in a righteous way. I'm second in command.

And I have to get my orders from him. But whatever he's called me to do, he's already gone before me and made all the arrangements. Hallelujah.

What a Savior. Amen.

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