

## **Journey to the promised land: Anointing for leadership.**

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Numbers 17v1-12 (The budding of Aaron's staff), Hebrews 9v1-12

Let me start by saying Happy Father's Day. I trust all the men this morning, and in all the Father's Day mornings that have been, that you've enjoyed waking up and opening up your hammers and power tools and drills, and then going out and cooking breakfast on the barbecue before washing it down with a bottle of beer in the garden shed. Or is that just me? No, but it's funny the associations that we put to manhood and to father figures. Some of them are very unfair, like dad jokes, which I think are personally the best in the world. But it's this connotation, these these kind of associations that I want to look at this morning. But I want to reassure you, this is not going to be a man's talk for manly men. Because what I'd also like to do is explore the idea of leadership, which is the title of our talk this morning, 'anointed for leadership'. So we heard from our reading how Aaron, elder brother and support to Moses was chosen from the 12 leaders of Israel to be the high priest over the Israelites. Now, in no uncertain terms was he chosen; he was anointed, he was set aside by God, when his staff not only budded but it sprouted, it bore fruit. It was unequivocal. Now, if you continue to read through numbers, we learned that this anointing came with a huge amount of responsibility. Aaron was set aside as high priest residing over the Most Holy Place on Earth, the altar of the Most High, the one place where God Almighty resided with his people. And this was a responsibility that if not performed properly, either by him himself, or by his family tribe of the Levites, who were also set aside with him, it was punishable by death. This was a lot to take on. Now, the first thing we notice, or the first thing that I noticed was that this most important role was not given to the one who had the most ambition, the most drive or determination amongst the Israelites. God didn't conduct an apprentice style competition where individuals were pitted against each other to find out who was the most competent. It wasn't the shouty popularity contest that we have to endure when the leaders of nations today are chosen. No, God knew the very man that he needed for the job. He knew his heart, and more importantly, he knew his faults, and he knew that he was capable. I wonder if Aaron knew that he was capable. And what is wonderful about this is that God loves to do it. Throughout the Bible, he chooses

those humans, that wouldn't perhaps be the top of our list to choose. Jonah who fled his calling, the 12 scruffy, lonely disciples, the dirty shepherds in the field who were the first to hear the good news of the Nativity, or God using Samuel to choose David, the shepherd boy to be king. God looks beyond what we see, and raises up those that we would happily overlook.

But this kind of presents us with a bit of a dilemma. Firstly, it's great news because it demonstrates that God can use us, all of us, to do His work, regardless of how equipped we feel we are for that. But conversely, how would we feel if God anointed someone to lead over us that we couldn't quite agree with? Just like they must have done with young David or those tatty disciples. It is so easy to judge people based on what earthly qualities that we need to be a good effective leader. We look for confidence. We look for clarity of communication. We look for charisma, we look for charm. We are, despite our best efforts, beguiled by personality. But God shows us that by doing that, we are focusing on the wrong things. We should be looking at people's hearts and their obedience to God. Just as God demonstrates in 1 Samuel 'the Lord does not know Look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' Sometimes God will use those people that perhaps we wouldn't. And it's exciting to think of what God will achieve through them.

Now as it is Father's Day, I thought it would be fitting if I spoke about my dad a little bit. Now, I know I'm immensely blessed to be able to say this, but for my whole life, and to this day, my dad is a hero in my eyes. He's a little bit bigger than that, not a lot bigger bit a little bit bigger than that. Here's someone that I would like to be like. He has characteristics that I would like to emulate and he's someone that I learned from. He's not loud and brash. In fact, quite the opposite. He has a warmth and a friendliness about him. And he always puts others before himself. Now, it also helps that he was a paramedic before he retired. So he actually saved people's lives, he changed the course of their futures, and even delivered a couple of babies. Now, to me, he is a true hero. Now, I have to say at this point, I don't idolise him. He is not without his faults, but that's what makes us human. But I do believe that his qualities outweigh these. And because of that, I care about what he thinks. I tried to think about what he would do in certain situations and I can use him as a benchmark for when I'm trying to make decisions. Now, he would hate the idea of being a leader,

the idea of being in the spotlight, being up at the front like this would be his worst nightmare. But he is a leader, just a leader, by example: the way that he acts, the way that he holds himself the way that he behaves, I would be a lesser man, I feel if I didn't try to emulate some of that. Now, I must stress now that I know how blessed I am to be able to say that. You may not have been able to buy a card today, or in the past. You may not have wanted to, for a whole wealth of reasons. And however you are feeling about that, I pray that you have peace. So many of us don't grow up with an earthly father figure. And that is a talk in and of itself. But even for those without that immediate, earthly figure, I know that it is true to say, for everyone in this place, that we all have people in our lives that we look at now and think, wow, I should be more like them. I should be as a patient as that person, I should be as loving or as forgiving as that person. Or more practically, I should read my Bible as much as they do, or I should pray as much as they do. We all have, in fact, we all need, these role models within our lives that we can learn from, so we can develop and we can grow. And I would argue also, whether you believe it or not, that there will be someone who looks at you and thinks, wow, I should be more like them. A character trait or an attribute that you possess, something that you do will be an encouragement or a challenge to others. Your god given gifts will be used to help others. And because of this, are we not all called to be leaders? Perhaps not leading up at the front or making the big decisions or being in the spotlight wherever that spotlight may be, but in leading by example, leading by how we conduct ourselves by how we respond to situations and how we behave. Now like Aaron, I wonder how capable we feel about that role.

Now at this point, I'd like to take a bit of a detour and highlight why I think this is important and stay with me for this bit. It has long been said that we're kind of all seeking something. We're looking for guidance in our lives. The proliferation of self help books is an example of this. But now in a technological world, where we are both more connected and more disconnected than ever before, this continues to be a yearning in people to find guidance. And the rise in online self proclaimed gurus is a testament to the need that is out there. There is estimated to be 10s of 1000s of online gurus, followed by literally millions of people, all seeking support and guidance within their lives, sometimes to almost cultish levels. There is a desire in people for guidance, for direction to know how to conduct ourselves, how to respond in certain circumstances, seeking a purpose. Now, this relatively new phenomenon is kind of

wrapped up in a whole wealth of issues that I think we should explore more as a church. But one area in particular, and particularly on Father's Day, is that of toxic masculinity. Now, you may be completely unfamiliar with this phrase. But a very basic definition is where the stereotypical traits of what it is to be a man: strength, dominance power, are exaggerated to a point where they become harmful. Dominance over others, especially women, is glorified, alongside aggression and superiority. It is destructive, and it is damaging, and it is a distortion of what God intends man to be. And it is this toxic masculinity that is being demonstrated and perpetuated throughout our community throughout our country. Now, you might feel that this is not something that we need to worry about. Because this is not a view widely held in the church. It might not be a problem for my generation or for that of my peers. But it is a problem for our children, for our grandchildren, for their generation, and their peers. Now, one particularly misogynistic influencer, has amassed over 4.5 million followers, many of whom are young boys, shaping their view of the world by emulating what they see and what they hear. And this is wreaking havoc, within the view of males in society. So damaging are his views, that charities have been going into schools to, quote, de radicalise young boys that have been swayed by his views of what a man should be, and how they should treat women. This is a current and a very real problem. But why am I talking about it? Not because I'm an expert, far from that. But because I believe that many of these people online are seeking role models. They're seeking leadership, and I believe that that leadership can be found here.

Now, I've already said that my dad is quite a good place to start. But I would like to suggest that my father, our Father, is a better place to begin. Jesus, the living embodiment of God, the Father was the perfect role model for us to emulate. He was patient, he was loving, he was kind, tolerant and forgiving. But alongside that, he was radical. He was confrontational. He was outspoken, he was challenging. He overturned the established way of things, and turned everything on its head, not just for the sake of it, or to get attention or to get noticed. He was all of these things because he had a purpose. He had a promise from his father. He had a clear and loving guidance, which must have given him the confidence to go on to live that world changing life that he did. To be a follower of Jesus, to emulate him, to be led by him, as he was by God is to be bold, is to be courageous. And it takes guts. To live as He did, to love as He did is revolutionary. And it will show. To those around you in

whatever setting you find your yourself, they will notice. Those people seeking gurus and influencers online, they will notice and perhaps be influenced by the radical life that you are living. In a week, where our community has been rocked by tragedy, we need to be a visible, tangible different way of living. We need to stand up and be noticeable. We need to be ready to show people that there is a purpose and a promise in life. You will be a leader, but you will be led by the very best example.

Now as we go out, and as a kind of a practical way of looking at this, we can only really learn to emulate God, to know his heart, by spending time with him. As we heard last week in the talk by Emily, we are influenced by those things that we spend our time on. So my prayer for us all is that we find time to be with God more. Let God speak to us more, and we allow ourselves to be guided by Him more. As Charles Kingsley said, I do not merely want to possess a faith. I want a faith that possesses me. And now going right back to the beginning, I leave you with the blessing that Aaron spoke out over His people: 'The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.'