

FOR HIS GLORY

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, August 19, 2018

Leadership is an attitude, not a position. Regardless of your position, or if you lack any title at all, you can lead others. For in the Kingdom of God, we are all priests and kings. As priests, we all enjoy first-person access to God, our Father. And, as kings, we all enjoy leading roles in the life that God gives us. There are no puppets here! No drones. No slaves.

Revelation 1:5 To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

It's Sacred

As a result, every role we play is elevated to the level of sacred. Every task we perform offers the potential of worship. To the glory of God our Father!

And that means that how we conduct ourselves, even in the most mundane activity is significant in its value and impact, even if it is presently invisible. What you do is Kingdom work. How you live is Kingdom activity.

But in this world, there are good kings and bad kings. And in this life, there are good priests and bad priests. Don't be one of the bad ones.

Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. ³ So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. ⁴ They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day believed there is only one God, maker of heaven and earth. They believed that the text of Scripture (the Old Testament) was the inspired, infallible word of God. They believed in the spirit world of angels and demons. They believed in the resurrection of the dead.

According to Josephus, a Roman historian of that time, whereas the Sadducees believed that people have total free will, and the Essenes believed that all of a person's life is predestined, the Pharisees believed that people have free will, and that God also has foreknowledge of human destiny.

As far, then, as this creedal list goes, the Pharisees were the equivalent of the Evangelicals of our day.

Of course, they were like us in another respect: the weakness of the mind and flesh, due to the corruption of sin.

Jesus did not hammer them about this, but was gentle, as He was with other sinners also. But when their sin had a direct and ongoing negative impact on others, Jesus spoke up.

Matthew 23:4 They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.

Modern Pharisees

I want to register a complaint today. I am angry with the modern Pharisees who lead people in similar ways. They take advantage of the people that God has given them to shepherd, putting religious burdens on them that they were never intended to bear. Shackling them with fear and appealing to their pride, they cripple their faith in Jesus. My heart breaks for the people of God who are overburdened by them. Such weights can last a lifetime!

Some church cultures are designed to perpetuate elitism, as though ministers were superstars. You will find their leaders dressed in uniforms, and their services full of pompous ceremony. Observing hierarchical roles, they imbue the people with competitive rivalries.

Matthew 23:5 "Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels. ⁶ And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues. ⁷ They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi.'

⁸ "Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters. ⁹ And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your Father. ¹⁰ And don't let anyone call you 'Teacher,' for you have only one teacher, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you must be a servant. ¹² But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

I am not against celebrations or honoring individuals for their contributions to the family of God, but the position does not make the man or woman.

Making Room

Now, I am the pastor of this congregation. But I did not seek this position, nor did I ask for this job. This job sought me.

I was a young Christian, enjoying being part of a lively church. But there was a vacuum of leadership among the young people. They needed an activity coordinator and a spiritual counselor, and I was inspired and energetic about such things. It turned out to be a natural fit.

My pastor urged me to study for a credential (and my young wife needed a husband with a paying job), so, forty-two years ago I received a License to Preach from the Assemblies of God.

Content with where we were serving at the time, I resisted the call to come to San Rafael. But a persistent member of the Board hounded me with the opportunity and the Holy Spirit said, "Walk through the door I have opened." I gave the church every chance to reject me, but they elected me instead.

Linda Pierce didn't ask for this job. But the Lord showed me something in her that He wanted to activate, and I persuaded her to follow His lead. She received a Certificate of ministry and now serves as our Pastor of Prayer and Spiritual Care.

Tim Eriksen didn't ask for this job. But the Lord showed me something in him that He wanted to activate, and I persuaded him to follow His lead. Next Spring, I expect that Tim will receive his Certificate of ministry to serve the body of Christ.

Veronica Heinlein didn't ask for this job. Although she grew up in a preacher's home, she chose a different path, pushing away from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. But God had planted in her something He wanted to activate. Using the testimony of her family in contrast to the emptiness of her own way, He spun her 180 degrees. Now she lives to glorify Jesus Christ, and she is also on the path to receive her Certificate of Ministry.

Proverbs 18:16 *A person's gift makes room for him, and leads him before important people.*

Be On Your Guard

I love my Savior, and I love what He has asked me to do. A vision of what we can be and do for Christ burns within my soul. Because of that, I am in danger every week of letting the work overtake me, at the expense of my own family. That is not what Christ has called me to, but that is what my self would make of His calling. I must be on my guard.

I read this week about a tragedy in one of our sister churches here in Marin County. The pastor and a staff member had an affair. She became pregnant. With promises to leave his wife for her, he persuaded her to have an abortion. When she had the child terminated, he broke off the relationship.

What a trail of wreckage has been left! The pastor and his family have been traumatized. The staff member and her husband have been seriously wounded. The church members have been

disillusioned. The church community of Marin has been bruised. And Marinites have one more excuse to reject the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Have a Servant's Heart

Church leaders are called to service, not to showmanship, and not self-serving. Every parishioner is a gift from Christ, the Head of the Church, and is to be cherished and nurtured as such. They are given for the leader's glory, but for the glory of God.

Service is a fruit of humility, a characteristic that is appreciated by all but, sadly, accepted by few.

Yet, leadership without humility is disrespectful and destructive.

Matthew 23:13 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either."

Jesus identified six demonstrations of the absence of humility in His charges against the Pharisees. These six form a pathway to personal and public implosion.

Promoting self-interest

¹⁵ "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!"

Skewing godly values

¹⁶ "Blind guides! What sorrow awaits you! For you say that it means nothing to swear 'by God's Temple,' but that it is binding to swear 'by the gold in the Temple.' ¹⁷ Blind fools! Which is more important—the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸ And you say that to swear 'by the altar' is not binding, but to swear 'by the gifts on the altar' is binding. ¹⁹ How blind! For which is more important—the gift on the altar or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰ When you swear 'by the altar,' you are swearing by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And when you swear 'by the Temple,' you are swearing by it and by God, who lives in it. ²² And when you swear 'by heaven,' you are swearing by the throne of God and by God, who sits on the throne."

Choosing the easy while neglecting the important

²³ "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more

important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. ²⁴ Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!

Permitting indulgence

²⁵ "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.

Engaging in hypocrisy

²⁷ "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. ²⁸ Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Repudiating history without redeeming it

²⁹ "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed, and you decorate the monuments of the godly people your ancestors destroyed. ³⁰ Then you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets.'

³¹ "But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started.

³³ Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell?

Remember, leadership is an attitude, not a position. And that attitude aims at the glory of God!

We are all leaders in the sphere to which God has called us. What we do is Kingdom work. How we live is Kingdom activity.

Live it, and do it, all for the glory of Jesus Christ.