

Setting the Pace

by Peter Maiden

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a clear goal, total commitment to others, and a caring ministry of encouragement in Christian leadership, as seen in the qualities of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 40:28

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Running The Race"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of Jesus as a role model for leaders. He highlights how Jesus' actions matched his words, which made him incredibly impactful and inspiring to others. The speaker also mentions the caring ministry of encouragement that leaders must have, balancing the push for potential with attentiveness to signs of stress. The sermon concludes with a call for individuals to reflect on their own ambitions and goals, and to strive to be examples and enablers of others in the kingdom of God.

Transcript

I just sense, you know, that this week for many of us, maybe small things, it may be big things, but there's been a lot of pressure and this is the verse that has come to my mind, Isaiah chapter 43 and verse 18. And maybe we can take this verse as the keynote verse to begin our conference. Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past, see I'm doing a new thing, now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I sense that there's been a lot of rushing around today, people being delayed on the roads and on the train, and maybe just a bit of a sense of rush, maybe disorientation, and Lord we want to turn to you now and ask that you will calm our minds and our imaginations and help us, Lord, just to fix our minds and our thoughts upon you and upon your word.

You want to speak to us tonight and we want to listen to your voice. Help us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated. I want to speak to you tonight from the book of Hebrews and I'd like you to turn in your Bible to Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12, we'll read the first three verses from there and then some verses in chapter 2. Hebrews chapter 12, very famous words, commencing at verse 1. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Then back to chapter 2. Hebrews chapter 2 and we read from verse 9 to verse 11.

Chapter 2 verse 9. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.

So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. Who is the greatest leader this world has ever known? To that question there can of course be only one answer, and that is Jesus Christ. And here in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 10, Jesus is given the title the pioneer of their salvation.

And earlier in the verse the writer says how as the pioneer he has brought many sons to glory. Man, created by God for his glory, was prevented by sin from attaining that glory until the Son of Man came and opened up a new way by which man might reach the goal for which he was made. So Jesus has blazed the trail of salvation, along which alone God's many sons can be brought to glory today.

Jesus is the great trailblazer of human history. He is the great pace setter. He is the archegos.

Now I don't know very much Hebrew or Greek. I know a little Hebrew and a little Greek. The little Hebrew owns the tailor's shop and the little Greek a restaurant.

I don't know very much at all. But this word archegos is explained in William Barclay's commentary on Hebrews. He says an archegos is one who begins something in order that others might enter into it.

And I want you to really remember that definition. An archegos, a pioneer, Jesus, is one who begins something in order that others may enter into it. Barclay gives examples.

He begins a family, just like Mickey Walker, that someday others may be born into that family. He founds a city in order that others may someday dwell in that city. An archegos, writes Barclay, is someone who blazes the trail, goes ahead so that others can follow.

Someone else has used this analogy. Suppose a ship was on the rocks and suppose the only way to rescue was for someone to swim ashore with the line in order that once the line was secured others might follow. The one who was the first to jump out of the boat and swim to the shore would be the archegos.

He would be the trailblazer of the salvation and safety of the others. And that's Jesus, the leader, the captain of our salvation, the trailblazer, the pace setter. Now let's look at another title of Jesus, this time in chapter 6 of Hebrews and verse 20.

Chapter 6 verse 20. In this sixth chapter the writer is reminding us of the certainty of our hope as Christians. And as a guarantee of our hope, the writer says in verse 20, Jesus has gone on before us as our forerunner into heaven.

Now this word translated forerunner is the Greek word prodromos, prodromos. And again Barclay says it has a three stage meaning. First of all it means someone who rushes on ahead.

Secondly it means again a pioneer. And thirdly it means a scout, a member of the reconnaissance corps, of an army, the advance guard. Someone, says Barclay, who goes ahead to see that it's safe for the body of troops to follow.

It's a fantastic picture of Jesus, isn't it? What has he done? He's gone on ahead of his people into heaven. He's gone on ahead of you and me as our prodromos, making it safe, preparing a place for us to spend eternity. It's another picture of Jesus, the pace setter, the trailblazer, the great leader of his people.

And so in this opening session, I want us to look at the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want us to look at these qualities of leadership and pace setting which we see in Jesus. And I think we'll discover that they are qualities which every Christian leader, every archegos, everyone who wants to begin something in his church or youth fellowship or Christian union, so that others can follow, every leader must to some degree possess these qualities.

Now just before we look at Jesus, let's think for a few moments of the necessary qualities of a pace setter in the world of athletics. It's the Bislett Stadium in Oslo. Another world record attempt by Seb Coe, who else, is about to be attempted.

And James Mays is again the chosen pace setter. For the first 800 meters, he blazes the trail. The crowd knows that he can't possibly last the distance.

Sure enough, after 800 meters of a suicidal pace, suicidal in the light of the race distance, James Mays drops out. Now here's five things about such a pace setter. Number one, he must have a clear goal in view.

He has discussed with the person he is seeking to help the time that is desired to pass through 400 meters and 800 meters and so on. He has a clear precise goal in view. Secondly, the total commitment of a pace setter is to someone else.

He's not looking for glory for himself. He is happy if by his commitment someone else is advanced. Someone else benefits.

Thirdly, the pace setter has to decide the maximum speed that will encourage. Too fast and he'll break the field. Too slow and the goal they're striving for will never be achieved.

Fourthly, the pace setter is someone whom others keep their eyes on at all times and their desire is to emulate the pace setter. Finally, of course, the pace setter is working for and fully expecting someone else to take over in the lead. Five essential qualities of every pace setter.

Now let's look at Jesus. Jesus in the epistle to the Hebrews. First of all, we see that he was a man with a very clear goal.

Look at chapter three and verse one. Jesus is given two other titles, the apostle and the high priest whom we confess. And in verse two, the writer says he was faithful to the one who appointed him.

Jesus had a divine appointment to be our apostle and our high priest. Now turn over to chapter five. The writer is explaining the selection process of the high priest and he writes in verse five, Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of the high priest.

But God said to him, verse six, you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Divine appointment, an important vital qualification for the Christian pace setter. It has been said by a number of people that there are two important questions which you should ask every leader.

The first is, where are you going? What is your objective? What is your ambition? What is your purpose? What dreams have you been dreaming? And the second question is, where are your people who is following you? It's great to have big ideas. Wonderful to dream dreams. Great to have specific big objectives.

But if nobody's following, you're going to be a very lonely and isolated person. Jesus knew from a very early age exactly where he was going. As a boy, when his distressed parents found him in the temple, after he'd gone missing, they began to remonstrate with him.

And you'll remember his response. He said to them with a sense of surprise, didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? As early as that in his life, he knew this sense of purpose. And it became increasingly apparent as his life continued.

Throughout the Gospels, he refers often quite poignantly to his hour. His hour. He knew there was a particular hour of destiny at Calvary for which he had a divine appointment.

The purpose, the plan for the redemption of mankind which Jesus knew to be the will of his father drove him onwards. A divine appointment and objective. That sense of purpose, that sense of fulfilling a divine appointment pervaded the whole life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

If you look at one of his great apostles, the apostle Paul, you see much of the same. Remember how he informed the Roman church in Romans 15 and verse 19. He said an amazing thing actually.

He said from Jerusalem all the way around to modern Albania, the most closed country in the world today. Paul says from Jerusalem all the way around to that country, I have preached. Isn't that amazing? I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

And then he says this in verse 20. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. If you want to understand the apostle Paul, you've got to understand that statement.

Here's my ambition, says Paul. Here is the dream that I am dreaming. I want to preach the gospel where Christ is not known.

Our conference text this weekend is 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 26. The Living Bible is a marvelous paraphrase of the verse. I run, says Paul, straight to the goal with purpose in every step.

I think you'll agree. Needed in the church of Jesus Christ today. Needed in churches, Christian unions, youth groups, up and down our land are men and women of ambition.

Men and women with a sense of divine appointment. Think of C.T. Studd, that great missionary pioneer who not only gave his own life to mission but founded the great worldwide evangelization crusade. Undoubtedly one of the greatest missions on earth today.

What drove on C.T. Studd? Some of you will know his famous little ditty. Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

That's what drove C.T. Studd on. Sounds very like the apostle Paul, doesn't it? My ambition to preach the gospel where Christ is not known. One of my favorite parts of the country is southwest Scotland.

A few weeks ago I was driving up through Castle Douglas, for any of you who know that area, and just on leaving Castle Douglas I saw a signpost. Never seen it before or never recognized, noticed it before. It was a signpost to Anwoth.

A-N-W-O-T-H. Anwoth. Any of you have heard of Anwoth? Those of you who know anything about the writings and the preaching and the life of Samuel Rutherford will know of the village of Anwoth.

One of the most godly men I've ever met in literature was Samuel Rutherford. A man who gave most of his life to a church of Scotland Parish in Anwoth, which was almost totally spiritually unproductive. What drove him on? What kept him going? Well, listen to his little ditty.

It's based on a marvelous hymn by Anne Ross Cousins, if you know it, Immanuel's Land. This is Rutherford's verse. Oh, if one soul from Anwoth meets me at heaven's door, my heaven will be two heavens in Immanuel's Land.

You might not think it's a very big goal, hardly a driving ambition, but that was Rutherford's sense of divine appointment. Just one soul from the village of Anwoth. At the commencement of this weekend, we want to ask you a question.

Do you have this sense of divine appointment? So much Christian work in Britain today seems to be carried on merely through a commitment to carrying on. There's no clear goal, there's no specific purpose, there's no driving ambition. I think we have to ask, are people dreaming any longer? You say, how do I find such a sense of purpose? Well, there are two simple pointers.

Number one is prayer. If you're going to know this sense of divine appointment and purpose, it may mean you putting some time aside, maybe with your fellow leaders, and meeting with God and saying, God, what do you want? And then secondly, it probably means a concentration on spiritual gifts. Now, I'm not trying to be so vital when it comes to this issue of divine appointment.

What should you be doing with your life? What spiritual gifts are there evident in your Christian union? This will be a big part of the answer to the question, what does God want of me? What does God want of us? The pace setter must have a clear goal in view, a sense of divine appointment. So it was with Jesus. And then the second thing about Jesus, the pace setter, is that he was a leader with a total commitment to others.

We've seen how Jesus, our Archegos, brought many sons to glory. And in order to do that, verse 9 of chapter 2 explains, he suffered death so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. Now, if you've got your Bible open at chapter 2, look at some fabulous phrases between verses 14 and 18.

Here's a man totally giving himself to others. Verse 14, he shared in their humanity. Verse 15, he freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Verse 17, he had to be made like his brothers in every way. Verse 18, he is able to help those who are being tempted. And then just flick across to chapter 7 and verse 25, one of the most magnificent phrases about the ministry of Jesus today.

Chapter 7, 25, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because, listen to this, he always lives to intercede for them. And this is the very essence of pace setting. It's the heart of biblical leadership, pouring out your life for the benefit and the advancement of others.

Did you see that in chapter 2 and verse 9? Did you see what the writer is really saying there? He's saying that Jesus suffered death for you and me so that the sting of death might be taken from us. When I was studying that verse, my mind went immediately to 1 John 3 and verse 16. Have you ever studied that verse? Not John 3, 16, 1 John 3, 16.

This is what we read there, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. How crucial it is for the Christian leader to understand Calvary. What does the cross of Jesus say to you tonight? This is what the cross of Jesus says to me with my particular leadership responsibilities.

The cross says that if I am to do my job, I must be willing and prepared to lay down my life, number one, for Jesus, number two, for my brothers and for my sisters. The Christian leader, you see, is an enabler, an enabler. He enables others to reach their full potential.

Remember the archegos? He begins something in order that others might enter into it. The pace setter's purpose is to enable someone else to reach his or her full potential. If you're considering leadership tonight, here's a vital question you have to ask yourself.

Are you willing to give your life for that? Are you willing to give your life so that others might advance? Are you willing to be an enabler? I wonder how many Christians there are in your Christian union or your youth group or your church who are just not realizing even half of their spiritual potential. What are they waiting for? They're waiting for someone to get alongside and lay down his life for them. Someone who's willing to bury his own position, his own prestige for the sake of that other person.

Because you know what happens, very often the person you get alongside, as they develop, they leave you far behind in many areas. How I thank God for the example of Barnabas. I suppose Barnabas is one of the most challenging figures in the whole of the Bible to me.

The son of encouragement. Remember after Saul's conversion, Acts chapter 9, the poor chap tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem. But they were all afraid of him, scared stiff.

Not believing, says Luke, that he was really a disciple. How typical of Christians in every generation, eh? Night and day praying that God would save people. And then one of the saved comes along and they say, no, no, no, that can't be the answer to prayer.

Not Saul! So they're scared stiff of this man. And then we read these magnificent words in verse 27. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

Soon, of course, Paul has to fly from Jerusalem, return us home to Tarsus. And then listen to Acts 11.25. Probably the rest of the church had forgotten Saul by now. Quite a bit of time had passed.

Then Barnabas went down to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And what happened? Well, from that city of Antioch, and particularly from Paul and Barnabas, the great international missionary drive of the Christian church began.

We are a product of what God did at Antioch. If it hadn't been for Antioch, it probably would have all been today a national religion. All the great worldwide ministry of the Christian church can be traced back to one enabler, Barnabas.

One man who saw the potential in someone else and was willing to give himself entirely that that someone else might reach his full potential. Eventually, of course, in human terms, you find Barnabas playing second fiddle to the apostle Paul. But that's what leadership is all about, being an enabler of others.

You know, it's only people who have understood Calvary who will ever be willing to give their lives to such a ministry. Thirdly, when you look at Jesus, the pace setter, you see he is totally committed to encouragement and to care. Remember the pace setter? He must encourage.

He must be careful that he doesn't go so fast that he'll break the one he is seeking to help, or so slow that the goal will never be realized. It's a very, very intricate task, pace setting, seeking for the fullest potential to be realized, but so careful not to destroy. And so it is in Christian leadership, and the beautiful picture of Jesus in the book of Hebrews as our high priest stresses this ministry of care, sympathy, and encouragement.

We've seen chapter 7 verse 25, he always lives to intercede for me and for you. We've seen that because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he's able to help those who are being tempted. And you see in chapter 4 verses 15 and 16, lovely words, he sympathizes with our weaknesses and that he's someone to whom we can go with confidence, knowing that we'll always find encouragement, always find grace to help us in our time of need.

You know, Jesus has a great goal for me, he's got a great goal for you. He wants to get us ready for heaven, and he knows just the right mixture of challenge and hardship, encouragement and sympathy to get us there. That's why he's such a great captain or leader of our salvation.

And every leader must, must have this caring ministry of encouragement. He must know the balance of pressing for the fullest potential to be realized in those that he's leading. And yet his eyes must be wide open for the very first signs of breaking and of stress.

It was said of Jesus when he was on this earth, and this is probably one of the most beautiful things that ever could be said of any man, a bruised reed he will not break, a smoking flax he will not extinguish. He is the Son of God with all the power of God. Yet there's not one bruised reed that he'll ever break.

Listen to Barclay's comment, the reed might be bruised, hardly able to stand erect, the wick might be weak, and it's light but a flicker. And so a man's witness may be shaky and weak, the light of his life at best a flicker, certainly not a flame. But Jesus did not come to discourage, he came to encourage.

He did not come to treat the weak with contempt, but with understanding. He did not come to extinguish the flame, but to nurse it back to a clearer and stronger light. The most precious thing about Jesus is this fact, that he's never the discourager, he's always the great encourager of his people.

Can you hear him? Simon, Simon, Satan wants to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith might not fail. And then fourthly, Jesus as the pace setter is the great example for us all to follow. Just as the athlete keeps his eyes on the pace setter, so the writer of Hebrews 12 says, we have to fix our eyes on Jesus as we run the race of life.

He says in verse 3, we are to consider him. If the heart of leadership is to be a servant who enables others, equally it is to be an example who inspires others. And this is so clearly seen in Jesus.

How do you explain the incredible impact of this man on other people? How was it that he could take a band of poor, unschooled, Galilean provincials and use them to light a revolution of love that continues to burn in the hearts of men and women throughout the world today? How was that done? It wasn't just his words, you know. Oh, they certainly had a massive impact. The people were amazed at two things.

They were amazed at the gracious words which came from his lips and by the fact that he spoke with such authority. But it was more than words. It was the combination of word and deed.

Word and example. You remember when John the Baptist sent his disciples to inquire whether Jesus was the Christ? Here's the reply of Jesus. Go back and report to John what you hear.

Tell him what I'm saying. And what you see. Tell him what I'm doing.

Tell John what you hear and what you see. The blind are receiving their sight. The lame are walking and so on.

Surely one of the most attractive, irresistible things about Jesus was that at last people had found someone whose deeds matched his words. He was a leader who was not just a talker but he lived what he said. Later on his apostle Paul could write these astonishing words in 1 Corinthians 4 17.

I'm sending Timothy to you Corinthians. He's going to remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. Can you see why Paul was such a great leader? He says I'm sending Timothy.

He'll tell you about my life and what will he tell you? My life is the same as what I've taught you everywhere in every church. Example. A model to follow.

So absolutely crucial in today's leadership. We don't need leadership by instruction from a distance. We need leadership by example right there alongside.

I wonder what your image of a Christian leader is? Is it of an executive flying around the world holding top level conferences? If so drop it please. Your image of the Christian leader must become a man willing to get his hands dirty. Out there with the troops, with the people, leading by example.

Not by statement from a distance but by example alongside. Christians who as they run the race of life fix their eyes on Jesus are inspired by what they see to keep running. I wonder what's the reaction when those whom you are leading look at you? They stop listening to what you say from the pulpit but they look at you.

Does what they see inspire them and encourage them or does it bring disillusion, demotivation? The pace setter inspires by example. Almost every Christian leader I talked to today when asked what's the greatest need in your organization or in your church gives the same reply. They say people.

People willing to rise to the challenge and willing to pay the price of leadership. In our own organization we've spent a lot of time recently dreaming dreams. Making plans for the late 80s and the early 90s.

But you know as we've talked and as we've prayed all of us have realized that the potential bottleneck which we face and which can destroy all our plans is lack of suitable leaders. Are you willing to pay the price of knowing a divine appointment? The price of getting before God and saying Lord I don't just want to be busy any longer. I don't just want to be faithful any longer.

I want to be busy. I want to be faithful fulfilling your agenda for my life. I want to be busy and faithful in my Christian union fulfilling your agenda for this organization.

Are you willing to reject the self-centered orientation of our society and sadly of much of the Christian church in our generation. Are you willing to reject that self-centered orientation and choose tonight to become an enabler of others. Prepared for that ministry of encouragement and sympathy which will not bruise the broken reed or snuff out the smoking flax.

To pour yourself out in the encouragement and the advancement of others. Are you willing to get your hands dirty? Reject the executive image for the servant place. Living your life alongside others to inspire and to motivate by example.

In other words are you willing to follow Jesus? The great trailblazer. The great pace setter. You know when you're ready to respond yes to those questions.

You are ready to contemplate biblical leadership. Let's bow together before God. Let's just take a moment to ask God what my response will be to his word.

So often we pray that we would be challenged but tonight we want to be changed. A question that changed my life 20 years ago was the first question Peter asked. What is your supreme purpose? Your ambition? Your goal? What is it that you really want in your life more than anything else? Am I willing to count the cost? To pay the price? Lord Jesus help us all to be examples.

Help us all to be enablers of others. Encourage us. Lord Jesus what a beautiful reputation that would be to have that we are encouragers of others.

Help us by your grace and with our commitment to be pace setters in your kingdom. In Jesus name. Amen.

That is all there is of this recording.

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