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February 26, 1995

Be Who You Is!

Just south of San Francisco there is a town called Colma. The locals have labeled it; City of the Dead. Many years ago San Francisco made it illegal to bury anyone inside their own city limits, so this little town just south became the burial ground for the Big City. It consists of cemetery after cemetery. Some say the dead outnumber the living there about 20 to 1. As one drives south out of San Francisco down 280 you can also see off to your left a large military cemetery. Row after row after row of little white crosses. It's a silent reminder to those thousands of soldiers who gave their lives in obscurity to secure our freedom. Freedom to be able to drive down the highway. Freedom to worship. On each of their graves is a name that few people would even remember, but they are the reason we today are free. They are unknown, but willingly and sacrificially gave of themselves. Not all of them had the same rank, not all had the same tasks, but all were committed to follow the orders of their commanding officer no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition.

Pretty sobering isn't it? I think of myself and the pitfalls we Christians here in our church body can get into. Our commanding officer has called each of us who are believers to follow His plan for us no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition. He has called each of us to different tasks, different arenas of leadership, service and support. But...sometimes we aren't content with the marching orders we are getting from the commanding officer. We sometimes get jealous of another's position. Many of us are unwilling to sacrifice and sacrifice without recognition. We are not particularly happy with the gift that God has given us. We are not particularly thrilled with the place of service that God has dropped us into. There is a reluctance to sacrifice, doing what God has planned for us. I'm not talking about those who really are not sure of what it is God has planned for you. I'm talking to those who do know what God has for you at this point in your life and your not at all content, let alone happy about it. Maybe you know what your

contribution to the body should be, but you have left that gift on the shelf gathering dust. Maybe you've been burnt in the past when serving the church body with your gift and your not sure you want to try again. Your not sure it's worth the risk.

There are three types of folks that you may find hanging around. There's the **Jealous follower**, the **Reluctant leader**, and the **Rotten Remainer**.

Are you tempted to be a *Jealous follower*? Maybe you find yourself in a support role and you'd kind of like to be in a leadership position. You find yourself backstage a lot and would rather be in more of the limelight.

Are you tempted to be the *Reluctant leader*? Maybe, you know deep down that God has called you to leadership, but you would really like to be in a support role for a while, you'd just a soon stop the pressure of leadership and quietly serve for a while.

Maybe you are one of those *Rotten Remainers*. You are alive but just barely. Maybe you've really been dead for the last 5 - 10 years. You catch yourself thinking "I've already put in my time...let someone else do the work...I'll just sit here and rot." Some of this group of folks may feel like they have no gifts to offer, maybe not physically able to do a lot, maybe they're feeling laid aside and neglected. But, instead of being there, remaining well, being there in support and encouragement, praying for folks, they let themselves rot in pitiful ineffectiveness.

All of us may struggle with some these pitfalls from time to time but we know that God has specially crafted the body of believers here to work together as a team. An organism that is living and growing, that needs each others talents and abilities gifted to them by God. God has given some to be leaders, some to be followers and some to be supporting remainers. Were going to get messed up if we try to be something we are not. I was told once to "Be who you is...cause' if you ain't who you is...you aren't any isser." We cannot be more or different than whom we are called to be. God has called each of us, those who are believers, to follow His plan for us no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition. Therefore, the leaders must lead, the followers must follow and the Remainers must...(support). My purpose this morning is to exhort God's

people to obediently follow God's plan for them no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition.

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 11. We see a problem that the leaders of Jerusalem must deal with. You remember that little nursery rhyme. Here's the church here's the people open the door and see all the people? Well, the Jerusalem leaders were saying, "here's the wall, here's the city, open the gates..my what a pity." Jerusalem is a city without people. The leaders are now living in the city, but there are few people who live there with them. What's a city without people. (READ) -3 All the leaders are in place but people are needed to populate the city of God. Back in chapter 9 the people got right with God and confessed their sin. In Chapter 10 they put first things first and allowed God a say in writing up their priority list. Now see what happens when the community of God has a problem. See how they respond to the need for God's people to inhabit the city of God.

Point #1 The Leaders must lead. Notice in verse 1 how the Leaders of Jerusalem are leading. They already had made the move into the city of Jerusalem. You may ask why weren't there more people living in the city. Weren't the walls all built and the temple all ready to go? Yes, but the city was still buried by piles of rubble and stumps and garbage. There hadn't been a wall around the city for 160 years. It had become the refuse dump for the surrounding suburbs. There was a lot of work involved in moving into a city. Plus, those who returned from captivity in Babylon had already built spacious and lavishly furnished homes in the suburbs. There was absolutely no desire to move out of the comfortable surrounding neighborhoods and move into the garbage dump inner city. They didn't want to give up the family homestead that had been theirs for years. There was not a lot of attraction to the city life, or else the leaders wouldn't have had this problem. A city without people.

But, the leaders had already made the sacrifice, left their homes outside in the country and moved into town. They didn't want to be called hypocrites for drafting others to go live in the city while remaining comfortably in their suburban executive suites. We don't read of any complaints..they just made the sacrifice and moved in. They led by example. Isn't it refreshing to see the leader leading. In a healthy

community of believers the leaders are doing exactly what God has called them to do..to lead. Time were tough but it's in those time that leaders come forward. Abigail Adams wrote, "These are the hard times in which a genius would wish to live. Great necessity calls for great leaders."

The leaders of the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce got together and decided that a tenth of the people in the surrounding areas should be drafted to move into and occupy the city. In the previous chapter the people committed to giving a tenth of their resources to God and now they are committing to give a tenth of themselves for inhabiting the city of God. If you are a leader sometimes you must make some tough decisions that aren't popular... but the body of believers sometimes must get what it needs and not what it wants. Notice there is not a lot of print as to who these leaders are. They did what needed to be done without a lot of recognition. Isn't it refreshing to meet a leader who doesn't need to be a superstar? One who is willing to become obscure for the sake of getting the job done. Leaders must lead no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition. If you are a leader, then LEAD.

Stuart Briscoe writes about a colleague of his who was officiating at the funeral of a war veteran. The dead man's military friends wished to have a part in the service at the funeral home, so they requested the pastor to lead them down to the casket, stand with them for a solemn moment of remembrance, and then lead them out through the side door. This he proceeded to do, but unfortunately the effect was somewhat marred when he picked the wrong door. The result was that they marched with military precision into a broom closet, in full view of the mourners. This story illustrates several principles. First, if you're going to lead make sure you know where your going. Second, if you're going to follow, make sure that you are following someone who knows what he is doing.

Has God called you to be a follower? Then follow well. Point #2 the followers must follow. Those who are followers must follow no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition. It's amazing how God places beautiful diamond gems back in some cave where no one will ever see it except God. Sometimes I think God often receives the most pleasure and glory from Christians whose lives are obscure, but whose inward walk is a beautiful fragrance of Christ to God, to those who are faithful followers.

Read with me verse 2 again. (READ) There are those who were compelled by law to relocate to the city, but look at those who volunteered. These people were blessed by the people. They pick up their belongings, left there safe and secure friendly neighborhoods in the suburbs. They left their family inheritance for rubble cleaning in Jerusalem. These were the folks who saw the need. It wasn't just thinking yes, the city does need to have people living in it to be great...I hope my name doesn't get chosen. The attitude was, Yes! the city needs people. I want to be close to the temple and the things of God. I don't care whether my name gets drawn...count me in. They were the sacrificial followers. They weren't some of those chosen who had to be forced into Jerusalem kicking and screaming. They wanted to serve God in the city of God. You can read the names in the rest of the chapter. There were 468 people from Judah. 928 folks from Benjamin. 1192 priest, 284 Levites, 172 gatekeepers. All these names are the sacrificial Sams and unrecognized Rodneys who willingly sacrificed because they felt that God wanted people to live and serve in the City of God.

Notice there is not a lot of complaining listed by those who were called to follow the leaders in moving on into the city. They came in to do the work they were called to do. The businessmen, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers. They weren't jealous that they weren't the ruling leaders of Jerusalem. They followed and followed well. They had orders from the God to move and they moved no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition. Are you a follower? then follow.

Point #3 Are you a remainder? then be a support. Be there. 90 percent of the people were to remain back in the suburbs, back in there neighborhoods. Not everyone is called to lead, not all are called to follow, some are called to support. Some are called to remain. To be a support for those who are leading and following the leaders. Are you a remainder? Some of you may be saying, Ahh! that sounds like a comfortable and easy job...that's me a remainder. OK, how well are you remaining? How well are you supporting? How well are you encouraging? Have you wipes out the I've done my share let the others carry the load now? Do you feel yourself developing a critical spirit toward others, sniping from a distance? Maybe physically you are no longer able to do a lot. Are you praying for others? Encouraging? Are you remaining well?

In that military cemetery south of San Francisco there were those who gave their lives who were just supporters. There were food service workers who kept the men fed, truckers who kept the supply lines filled and moving. There were mechanics who services the planes and tanks and ships. Janitors and paper pushers. All who were unknown but vital to the effort. Without them nothing ever would have happened. Leaders are fine, but their vision is worthless without people to follow. Followers are fine but they can't do their job without those who will stay back and support. Are you a leader? Don't be reluctant..Lead! Are you a follower? Don't be jealous...follow. Are you a remainder? Don't rot with inactivity...support and encourager. Don't get your nose bent out of shape if you are not happy with where God has called you. The leader is as equally vital as the follower and the follower as vital as the remainder. Be where you is..because if you ain't where you is you aint' any iser. We don't all have the same tasks, but we all must be committed to follow the orders of our commanding officer no matter the sacrifice, regardless of recognition.