

# Moses Last Words

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] 7. We'll be right around there this morning. I think it's page 180-something, somewhere around there. It is a new year. 2016 is over. And a lot of what you see in the news is all about how many celebrities died in 2016. And when things like that happen, we tend to put a special significance on the last words of these kind of people. The last words are important.

When we know that we have only a little bit of time left, we want to make our last words count. Now, of course, sometimes we don't realize which words will be our last. There was a singer, Johnny Ace was his name, and he was playing with a pistol, and he said, I'll show you that it won't shoot, not realizing that those would be his last words. But when we know that we're leaving the world soon, we tend to focus our last words on the things that we believe matter most. So today, what we're going to do is we're going to look at some famous last words of a man called Moses, which in your Bible is called the book of Deuteronomy. Now, there's a lot of important things that Moses could have said in his last big speech to the nation of Israel. They're about to go into the promised land that had been promised for hundreds of years. They had just spent 40 years in the wilderness. But it's interesting to see that Moses does not use his last time with the Israelites to focus them on how to prepare to train for battle with the Canaanites, who were more numerous and better equipped for battle than the Israelites. He doesn't focus on how to set up the most efficient form of government, which they would need, how to make crops and cattle thrive in a new land, how to promote small businesses, make good alliances, or provide good social services for their new nation.

It's not that these things are unimportant. Many of them are actually addressed in the book of Deuteronomy, but they certainly are not the primary focus of what Moses wants to emphasize in his last words. And the reason is because Moses knows that Canaanites and crop failures, they're not by any means the biggest problem that can happen to the Israelites. Deuteronomy makes it clear the worst thing that can happen to Israel is for them to forget God. And Moses says that the temptation, the temptation to forget God will come in a number of ways. And as we head into a new year, I think it's very good for us to look at this because we are going to face the same challenges in 2017. So Moses says, we're going to look at three different ways that Israel will be tempted to forget God in their new land. Number one, they could be afraid of their enemies and external threats, tempted to forget that God is more than big enough to deal with these things. Number two, they could be drawn away by the cultures around them and forget the real God in favor of the empty promises of sin. And number three, they could be proud of their own righteousness, of their own accomplishments, and start to feel self-sufficient, forgetting that God gave them all of these things as a good gift and that they constantly depend on him. So what we're going to do is we'll look at these three temptations and the one solution that Moses gives that covers all of them. So first, Israel will be tempted to forget God because of the fear of external threats. Look in chapter 7 and verse 17. You may say to yourselves, these nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out? But do not be afraid of them. Remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all

Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm with which the Lord your God brought you out. The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. Do not be terrified by them for the Lord your God who is among you is a great and awesome God. So when we look at a situation, when we look at it reasonably and we measure the odds and we find that we don't really measure up, the odds put us at a real disadvantage.

We're afraid. It's only natural. Israel was going to war with nations that were bigger than they were, that were better equipped for battle, had fortified cities and all, and they did not measure up to the

odds against them. But it should be noted here that Israel going into these bad odds was actually exactly where God wanted them to be. God himself was asking them to go and do something that by any reasonable calculation looked impossible. So we shouldn't really be too hard on them for being afraid. We do the same thing when we face difficult situations while we're following God, because God still regularly asks his people to do the seemingly impossible. Often obeying God doesn't mean being comfortable and getting everything easily. Often it means doing things that look like they could ruin us.

[ 5 : 51 ] Even if we never have to face battles with armies like Israel, it might mean taking a stand that costs us our social life because people don't understand why we won't do what they do.

It might cost us a relationship with someone we're very attracted to because our lives are headed in different directions. It might cost us a promotion or even a job because we won't dishonestly cut corners for the company. Sometimes obedience looks like it adds up to be the worst option available to us.

But Moses says that's because we've left out the most important part of the equation, and that is God. Look at verse 18 again. Remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm with which the Lord your God brought you out. In verse 21, do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God who is among you is a great and awesome God. Basically, Moses is making the same point here that Paul makes in Romans 8, if God is for us, who can be against us? Yes, we may face all sorts of terrible situations, enemies, disasters, but if the God of the universe is promising to work all of these things for our ultimate good, then we don't have to fear them. The key, though, is that we must remember, remember who

God is and what he has done, his power. We must make our calculations with the most important piece in place, that God is God. And if he is with us, and if he has shown his power already in the past for us, he's shown his faithfulness, he's shown that he is good to his promises, we can bank it all on him and know that the odds really will always be in our favor, as Katniss Everdeen would say. But notice the difference. Moses doesn't encourage the Israelites with a pep rally. He doesn't encourage them with nice slogans like, Is Fader Lind? Or, If you believe, you can achieve. That's because Moses knows that building ourselves up won't actually work. We can have really, really good self-esteem. We can have wonderful confidence, but it won't change the reality that we are, in fact, actually very small. We are, in fact, actually unable to control the people and events around us to any great degree at all.

[ 8 : 35 ] Moses does not argue with Israel that the odds are not against them on their own. The odds are against them on their own. In fact, he's very clear. They have no ability to do this by themselves. But his point is that it never depended on them anyway.

Look in verse 7. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples. For you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is God. He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. Israel, like us, were not strong enough in themselves. That's no problem because God is more than enough if they will trust him. God is big enough to deal with any number of angry Canaanites. He's powerful enough to send rain on thirsty ground.

He's God. Economies, alliances, recessions, wars, Brexit, Donald Trump's terrorists. None of these things can get the best of God. The God who spoke the universe into existence by the sheer power of his command. Israel's biggest threat will never be external things like enemies and disasters, and neither will ours. If God's people keep their focus on God, they will not need to fear any external situation, any external threat, even though we do still have to face them. But keeping our focus on God is going to be harder than it might seem. It's harder for Israel than it might seem. The real damage of external threats is that they can cause God's people to take their eyes, to take our eyes off of God because of the fear. So Moses warns them, you've got to remember who God is. Don't lose sight of that reality in the middle of the difficult circumstances.

You've got to remember God. We've got to remember God. But it's not only the difficult times. It's not only the external circumstances that are going to tempt us to forget him. Moses also says that Israel will be tempted to forget God because of the powerful lies of the cultures around them.

Now, Jesus said the greatest commandment of all is in Deuteronomy 6.5. You can turn there if you want. It's right next door. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. The second one, Jesus said the second greatest commandment is from Leviticus 19.18.

[ 11 : 34 ] Love your neighbor as yourself. This is what we were made for. To be close to God, to find our life in loving and being loved by him. And then to find, you know, his love poured into our hearts, into our lives, and then to reflect that out to others. That's what God made us for, to love God, to love people. But then in chapter 7 here, Deuteronomy 7, verse 25, Moses says there's something Israel should definitely not love. He says, the images of their gods you are to burn in the fire.

Do not covet the silver and gold on them. Do not take it for yourselves. You will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God. Do not bring a detestable thing into your house, or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Utterly abhor and detest it, for it is set apart for destruction. So we have these commands to love God, to love people, and to detest idolatry. Love, love, hate. But it's not really so surprising. I mean, I love my wife. And if I really love my wife, shouldn't I detest any hint of adultery with another woman? And the Bible often compares idolatry with adultery. It is an absolute betrayal of our claim to love God. But when you think about it, why in the world would Israel be tempted to go after another God, when they had seen the real God do so much for them? All these amazing miracles, bringing them out of Egypt, providing for them in the wilderness, doing all of these amazing things that he had done for his people. I mean, what could possibly entice Israel, who had seen all of this, to worship a different God? We don't actually have to guess, because we've seen it happen in the Old Testament a couple of times before Deuteronomy. It happens in Exodus, and it happens in Numbers, because of different reasons. In Exodus, Israel makes a golden calf to worship, because they're tired of waiting for God, who is taking his time, giving them the covenant at Sinai. They were tired of waiting for God. But is that really, are we so different? I mean, we too, we chafe at the times that God makes us wait. Sometimes it seems like he's forgotten us.

Our situation is getting too bad, and we need to do something now. We need to take matters into our own hands, because God is just too late. Now, we may not use a golden calf, like Israel, but the thinking really is the same. God is too slow, so we try to control things. We try to manipulate things. We try to manipulate the circumstances through appealing to some other source of power. Maybe it's money. Maybe it's influence. Maybe it's deceit. We depend on something or somebody else to try to fix the situation without reference to God. And we don't think of ourselves as idol worshipers when we do that, but we're actually doing exactly what idol worshipers have always done when we try to manipulate whatever powers we can to work in our favor apart from trusting in God. In effect, we're worshipping a power other than God and trusting in it instead of him. That's what happened in Exodus. But there was another time that Israel turned away from God already, and that was in Numbers. In Numbers, they were drawn away to worship other gods by Moabite women who invited Israelite men to sexual acts of worship. So it wasn't logical arguments that got them to turn away from God. It was beautiful, easy women. And once again, really, are things so different now? There are several people I knew growing up in church as children and as teens. They looked very Christian, and yet eventually they turned completely away from God. And one day it hit me that every single one of them, at the time that they turned away from God, was involved in sexual sin. And I don't think that that's a coincidence. Our culture is in love with sexual satisfaction, even though they never seem to be able to find the satisfaction bit of that. They're always worshipping sex as the ultimate source of goods. And that's nothing new. Israel was doing the same thing when they went after the gods of Moab. But these are empty promises. And Moses warns that Israel cannot have it both ways.

[ 16 : 33 ] They cannot worship the gods of the cultures around them, acting like they are the givers of every good gift, and at the same time love and worship the real God who is the real source of every good and perfect gift. We can't do both. 1 John 2.15 says, do not love the world or anything in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. So what's the solution though? What if we find our hearts attracted to love other things more than God? Well,

Moses gives us a bit of advice in Deuteronomy. He says, we've already read in chapter 7, how we should not give idols a chance. He says to Israel, destroy them. A man who wants to love his wife first and best is going to have a hard time doing that if he's looking at pornography on the screen in front of him. A person who wants to love God first and best is going to have a hard time doing that if they're constantly filling their minds with the world's beautifully packaged lies. If we allow these lies into our homes, into our TVs, into our heads, and expect everything to be just fine, we're fooling ourselves. Moses also says in chapter 6, verse 13, you can look there. He says, fear the Lord your God. Serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the people around you. For the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you and he will destroy you from the face of the land. These are not encouraging words.

We talked about how God is bigger than any external threat that we face and we can trust him. And that's a very encouraging thing. But that same God who is so big and so good and so trustworthy and so powerful beyond imagination, that's not only good for remembering that we don't have to fear external threats. It's also good for helping us fight sin's lies. Because remembering who God is helps us remember that sin is very serious. It is actually treason against the God of the universe. [19:03] That is a serious thing. And it's a perspective we desperately need. But ultimately, not even that will be enough by itself. What we need is in chapter 6, starting in verse 4, where Moses says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. These commands that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. See, the way to fight wrong loves in our hearts is not just to stamp out those loves and leave their place empty. Our hearts were made to love. They will love. They must love something. In the Garden of Eden, Satan convinced Adam and Eve that there was satisfaction and good in loving something besides God. And ever since then, we've been looking everywhere possible for what that thing could be that we could love that would give us satisfaction and good apart from God. But it doesn't exist. Our hearts were made to love God and no other object, no other person, no other cause, nothing else could ever satisfy us apart from Him.

David cries out to us in the Psalms, Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. And he says, In His presence are pleasures forevermore. So Moses says, we must constantly remind our hearts in any way possible, not only of how powerful God is, that we don't need to fear external threats, but also remind our hearts of how good God is, so that our hearts will be drawn to love the real source of everything true and good, and not the empty imitations and the lies that sin offers us so loudly and so constantly.

So Israel will be tempted to forget God because of the external threats that they face. They will be tempted to forget God because of the beautifully packaged lies of the culture around them. But then there's another area that Moses warns Israel about. They will be tempted to think that they deserve what they get and that they don't need God anymore. So look in chapter 9, verse 4.

After the Lord your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, the Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness. No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land. But on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand then that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff necked people. Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord.

He's repeating the same thing over and over again. It's not because of your righteousness. It's not because of your righteousness. It's not because of your righteousness. It's kind of like Moses thinks that they might be tempted to think that these good gifts come because of their righteousness.

[22:56] But that's natural, isn't it? I mean, we're all tempted to think that the good things we get in life come to us because we're really good people. We've done good things. Karma is a popular idea because it reflects the way we think things ought to work. Good things come to those who do good.

Bad things come to those who do bad. But God is saying here very clearly to Israel that he is purposefully doing good to them, not because they were good, but in spite of the fact that they were rebellious against him. He's doing good to them because he is good, not because they were good. And he made good promises which he intends to keep. There's absolutely nothing that Israel has done to deserve these promises. In fact, Moses spends most of chapter 9 reminding the people of Israel how many times they rebelled against the Lord. He actually sums it up in 9.24.

He says, you've been rebellious against the Lord ever since I have known you. He reminds the Israelites that the only reason they still exist as a nation, in chapter 10, verse 10, he says, it was not his will to destroy you. They had given God plenty of cause for judgment, but God chose instead to be gracious. And Moses says that this is something they must remember. Why?

Because if they don't, they'll be tempted to think that all of their prosperity frees them up from needing or depending on God. Because they have things sewn up very well. Thanks very much.

[ 24 : 40 ] But look in chapter 8 and verse 10. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I'm giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase, and all you have is multiplied, then your hearts will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions.

He brought you water out of a hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and test you, so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

So not only did God refrain from destroying Israel in their rebellion, he went further and he blessed them with all of this abundance. And God has done the same for us, even more so actually in Jesus, taking our punishment that we deserved, that's what we deserved, and giving us instead even greater gifts than he gave to Israel. But sometimes the sheer volume of God's blessings can make them easy to take for granted. I mean, how often do we really think about the fact that every single moment we live is a gift of undeserved grace? I mean, that's totally undeserved for sinful people.

Remember, the wages of sin is death. No, see, instead of, we generally tend to focus and think a lot more and complain about the hardships that we face in life, a life that we never deserved in the first place. It's telling that people love to ask the question, why does God allow bad things to happen?

[ 27 : 00 ] But we never really take the time to ask the question, why does God allow good things to happen to people who have rebelled against him so completely? We quite easily get used to God's blessings.

And pretty soon, we start thinking that we earned those blessings ourselves. And then we start to think that we deserve those blessings. These blessings are ours by right. And if God takes some of them away, even for a moment, we get really angry because we feel like our rights have been violated.

Never stopping to consider that even the ability to yell at God is a gift of grace that is completely undeserved. But what's the answer? Moses says in chapter 8 and verse 10, when you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I'm giving you this day. Sounds familiar by now, I think.

The fact is that all the big problems that Moses warns Israel about have the same solution. Are we afraid of external threats that we're going to face? We have no strength to face them on our own.

[ 28 : 22 ] Are we falling for the empty but oh so beautiful lies of the world around us? Are we starting to think that we earned and that we deserve everything that we have?

The answer to all of these things is the same. Remember. Remember God. Remember who he is and what he has done for you.

Remember that he is stronger than anything that we face. Remember that he really is the only true source of satisfaction and joy for our lovesick hearts. Remember that everything we have is a gift from him.

Remember to fear God and we don't need to fear anything else. Remember to love God and our hearts will be so full that the other loves just really won't be able to compete. Remember that we depend on God for everything and that he is powerful. He is good and he is totally completely dependable. He proved it to Israel.

He has proved it to us much more so on the cross. Don't forget to remember the Lord in every circumstance you face, in the depths of our own hearts. Remember the Lord this year. Amen.

[ 29 : 44 ] We are going to finish with the song, Great is Your Faithfulness. Sorry, it's sign number 200 in the book.

Thank you.