

Keeping the end in View

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[0 : 00] Shall we turn back to chapter 10 of Numbers, and we'll read again in verse 29. And Moses said to Hobab the son of Reol the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you.

Come with us, and we will do good to you, for the Lord has promised good to Israel. Come with us, and we will do good to you, for the Lord has promised good to Israel.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. The believer is on a journey, a journey that has a fixed destination.

And although this life will do its best to divert us to the right or to the left, we need to keep our eyes fixed and focused upon the author of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, because he is the ultimate destination for the Lord's people.

We read in Hebrews, for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. And the book of Numbers describes part of the journey of the Israelites after they had left Egypt and they were on their way to the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey that the Lord had promised to them.

[1 : 39] And at this point in the narrative, we are two years after having left Israel and they paused in the desert and they built the tabernacle, they built all of its furnishings, they built the gorgeous robes that would be worn by the high priest.

They made everything in accordance with God's plan down to the finest detail. And now at this point in the story, having made the tabernacle and all its furnishings, they were setting out on what should have been the final stage of their journey.

As a child in church, I could never get my head around the fact that it took them 40 years from leaving Egypt until they finally entered the land of Canaan.

And the Bible that I had in church was one of these Bibles with a series of maps at the back. And no matter which way I looked at that map, I could never understand why it took them 40 years.

Even if they had taken the wrong road, surely it would not have taken that long. But the reason they were in the wilderness for 40 years was that they looked back to Egypt and they felt a loss for the things that they no longer had.

[3 : 03] They grumbled, and the word grumbled is a direct translation of the Hebrew word. They grumbled at the providence that the Lord had provided for them in their wilderness wanderings.

They grumbled at the food that God provided. The manna was boring. It was the same food day in and day out. What manna again? We had that this morning.

We had it yesterday, and I suppose we'll have it again tomorrow. They grumbled against the Lord. They grumbled at the lack of fresh, drinkable water in the desert.

And they were thinking back to when they were in Egypt of all the different vegetables that they had, of leeks and onions and such like. And in the end, they were going to turn against Moses and against Aaron, and they were going to go back to Egypt.

They preferred to be in slavery where they had food aplenty, rather than wandering through this arid wilderness. And because of their unbelief, because of their lack of trust in the Lord, the Lord who had done amazing things for them, the Lord who had led them out of Egypt by sending all those different plagues upon the Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, the Lord who had parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they could go safely across, the Lord who brought the waters cascading back again to destroy the pursuing chariots of Pharaoh's army.

[4 : 36] And so because of their unbelief, the Lord promised them that they would never enter the promised land, that they would wander until the last of them had died, and it would be their children and their grandchildren who would enter in to Canaan and inherit the promises.

And that's why it took them 40 years. It took 40 years for all of that generation to die and be buried in the desert, all except Caleb and Joshua, son of Nun.

These two men had faith. These two men trusted in the promises of the Lord. They knew that what the Lord promised, he would deliver. And when they came back from a spying mission in the land of Canaan, it was only Caleb and Joshua who, despite the apparent military prowess and the size of the inhabitants of Canaan, they knew that the Lord being with them, they would overcome and that they would win a victory.

But the others mourned. They said, we've seen these men on the other side of the Jordan River.

They are like giants and we're like grasshoppers compared to them. And their hearts quailed within them and they wanted to turn back and return to Egypt.

When the spies, 40 years on, when the two spies that Joshua sent out went into the city of Jericho, they found out from Rahab, the prostitute, the innkeeper, that it was the hearts of the inhabitants of Canaan that were quaking within them because they knew that God had promised his people the land of Canaan and they had seen the victories that God had given them already over their enemies.

[6 : 26] And they knew that what God determined to do, there was no power at all, could thwart his purposes. And so here, we've not yet come to that point where the Lord punished his people, but here, having made the tabernacle, they set out to what should have been the final part of the journey.

And Moses' brother-in-law, Hobab, was there and he had decided that he would return to his own people because he was an inhabitant of the desert.

He wasn't interested in going to Canaan. He lived in the desert. He'd been brought up in the desert.

And that's where he was at home. And it's at that point that Moses pleaded with his brother.

We are setting out for the place at which the Lord said, I will give it to you. Come with us and we will do good to you, for the Lord has promised good to Israel.

The Israelites, their ultimate destination was not in the wilderness. It wasn't in the desert. It was in the land of Canaan. They were simply in transit in the wilderness.

[7 : 42] But for Hobab, the desert was his home. It's where he was accustomed to live. He'd been there all his life. He was accustomed to the rigors of desert life, as are the present-day nomads who live in the desert.

But Moses urged him to come with us. And the first point that I want to make here this evening is, as the wilderness was not the home of the Israelites, so this world is not our home.

Yes, I know we live here and there are so many things that we enjoy at the Lord's hand. But this is not our ultimate home. We're passing through. We are pilgrims.

We're on our way to a better place. We're setting out, said Moses. And when we first came to faith as individuals, we were also setting out on a journey.

In the first year in the desert, the Israelites experienced the bitterness of the undrinkable water at a place called Marah, where the water could not be drunk, but the Lord sweetened it for them and so enabled them to refresh themselves from that water.

[8 : 58] It was a token of God's care and concern for his people while he was taking them through the wilderness. They also savored the refreshing tranquility of an oasis called Elim, where there were 70 palm trees.

It was a place of shade. There were the palm trees. There was the springs of water coming up from the ground. It was a place where they were able to rest. And in the midst of the aridity of the wilderness, it must have been a beautiful place, a place where they would have longed to linger somewhat longer.

But it wasn't their final destination. These were but way stations on a longer journey. And as Christians, our journey too has sweet moments and it has bitter moments, times of great joy and times of great sadness.

Yes, mountaintop experiences when we enjoy the close relationship of the Lord and other occasions when we pass through the veil of tears and the darkness seems to hem us in.

Our journey takes us through many different terrains, but gradually we pass through them all as we journey on. By faith, we read in Hebrews 11, Abraham, when called to go to a place, he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went.

[10 : 25] By faith, he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

But he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And like Abraham, we too are journeying by faith.

We've not seen heaven. Nobody has returned from heaven to tell us what it's like. But we have God's word. We have the Bible. We have the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And this gives us the promise of God that if we should trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will find a place of rest, eternal rest in heaven awaiting us at the end of life's journey.

A place of bliss and a place of joy, but reserved only for those who would entrust themselves to the finished work of Christ upon the cross.

[11 : 27] And here we pass through the veil of tears, as I said, but when we enter into heaven, all that will be left behind. In Revelation 21, God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. The rich man in the banquet, the rich man, sorry, in the parable that Jesus told, he had these amazing banquets.

And the poor man, Lazarus, sat at his gate, longing even for a crumb that would fall from the rich man's table. But at the end of his opulent life, it was the rich man who went to a lost eternity, who went to hell, whereas it was that poor man, Lazarus, who went to heaven.

And the rich man is called out to Abraham to send Lazarus to go back and warn his brothers, lest they should also end up in this place of torment.

But Abraham responded to him. They have Moses and they have the prophets. Even if somebody came back from heaven, they would not believe him. And we have Moses and we have the prophets and we have more.

[12 : 46] We have the whole of the New Testament. We have God's word, God's promises, which are unshakable and which are cast iron. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whomsoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

There is no greater promise in all of scripture and all that's required of any man or woman is to come by faith and to reach out and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we then have the promise of God that we will not perish. We will not go to a lost eternity. We will not end up in hell. But we will have everlasting life.

We will go to be in the nearer presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe in the sufficiency of scripture. We hear people in the various sects and the various heresies who tell us that they've got something over and above scripture.

They have a special revelation that God gave to somebody at some stage in the past. But my friends, don't believe in it. We have here all that we need to know about God and all that we need to know about ourselves and all that we need to know about what we should do to get right with God.

[14 : 05] God's word points us to the cross. And at the cross, that is where the salvation for sinners has been fully accomplished. So we press on by faith, trusting in God's word.

Jesus told Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. We have not seen. And yet for many of us here this evening, we have believed.

We have been enabled by God's grace to believe and to trust in his promise. The righteous shall live by faith. That wonderful passage that Martin Luther stumbled upon and that was the beginning of the Reformation, that the righteous will live by faith.

Not by works, not by good deeds, but by faith and by faith alone. There are many people on their Christian journey who may lack assurance.

The devil will come and he will try to sow the seeds of doubt in our hearts. But Jesus has a word for them. Do not let your hearts be troubled, he says.

[15 : 13] Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms, many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go, I shall come back to take you to be with me where I am. And Jesus has made that preparation. He has gone before us long, long ago.

And he has prepared a place for each and every one of his children. He purchased our redemption by shedding his own precious blood for us at the cross at Calvary.

We read in Hebrews 9, he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood, having attained eternal redemption. And when the allotted time comes for each one of us to leave this world, to leave our pilgrimage and to pass from time into eternity, Jesus will come and take his

people by the hand and lead them through the valley of the shadow of death.

The shadow, not the reality of death, not the substance of death, but simply the shadow. And so that's the first point, that as a Christian, this world is not ours.

[16:36] We're simply passing through. We're on a pilgrimage. We're looking for the city not made by the hands of men, but the city that God has prepared for his people.

And as we look ahead to our ultimate goal, we find that there are many distractions along the way. As a boy, we used to take the annual trip from London up to Lewis and we'd board the sleeper train in Euston one year, King's Cross the next year.

So one year we would go up the west and the next year we'd go up the east coast. And when we awoke in the morning and the sleeper, we looked out, we would be crossing Ranach Moor and my brother and I, our faces would be pressed against the window in amazement because we've left London with its neat parks and commons.

And here was this wild panorama of mountains with the mist sort of tumbling down from the corries. And we would say to one another, one day we'll come back and we'll climb that mountain, we'll fish that loch, we'll fish that river.

And then as the train journeyed on, we would be looking back at some interesting point as it receded into the distance.

[17:55] We wanted to get off and explore, but our ultimate destination for our holiday lay ahead. And we could only look wistfully by as we sped on because our destination was in Lewis.

and the welcome of our family there was so warm that when we got there we completely forgot about Ranach Moor.

When our grandparents came out of the house and impressed us, I'm sorry, we forgot all about Ranach Moor. We forgot about the mountains and we forgot about the locks.

The traveler can admire the passing scenery, but we're not to set our hearts upon it because our destination lies ahead.

And we're moving forward all the time. We fix our eyes on Jesus because Jesus himself is the focal point of our destination.

[18:54] And the road that leads us there is very narrow. It's the narrow way and it can be precariously narrow at times. And the evil one will try to divert us to the right or to the left.

He will try to push us off of that narrow way. Sometimes we can cling too tightly to the things of this world. Things that merely entangle us.

Things that at the end of the day will be left behind. Last week I was staying in a lovely holiday home over in Uig.

It's a holiday home and it's much nicer than most people's main residence. And a friend of mine came along. She wanted to have a nosy and she was really marveling at how beautiful this house was.

But her husband who was with her merely said you can't take it with you. You can't take it with you. And that's very true. We can marvel at the things that we come across in this world.

[19:58] But they will all be left behind. We cannot take them with us. And Jesus may return at any time. And the question for any one of us is are we ready to meet with him?

Are we ready to meet with Jesus if he should come calling this very night? The Israelites looked to the Lord to provide for them. He gave them their daily portion of manna.

They always had sufficient. They never lacked. And on the eve of the Sabbath he gave them a double portion so they wouldn't have to break the Sabbath day and go gathering the manna.

He gave them a day of rest. That was God's command to them. Neither did they build houses and settle down. They lived in tents. Their life was mobile.

They were constantly moving. Their possessions were portable. The tabernacle was designed to be taken apart and to be carried. And then when they got to their destination when the cloud of the Lord stopped and they would reassemble the tabernacle and they would stay there as we were reading in chapter 9 until the Lord commanded them to move on again.

[21:09] They were looking ahead. They were not to look wistfully back as did Lot's wife and turned into a pillar of salt. And on life's journey we're called to avoid anything that would entangle.

Cast off all that would entangle us and draw us away from Jesus. In Hebrews 12 throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the risks marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher the author and perfecter of our faith. When we come to retire we might want to move away from where we've been living where our place of work is and we might look at various parts of the countryside and say well that's a lovely looking village this is a lovely part of Scotland perhaps we should go and settle down there.

But although it might have an outward beauty spiritually speaking it might be as arid as the wilderness through which the Israelites were passing. Is there a local church there where God's love is faithfully preached where people believe in the Bible?

Are there true Christians to be found there? People with whom we can enjoy fellowship and Bible study and who will pray for us and we for them. Many a portion has ended up in a place that outwardly looked beautiful but they found that there was nothing there to feed their souls.

[22 : 46] Just like Lot when Lot and Abraham parted ways. Lot chose the well watered valley of the Jordan and there was water and there was grass aplenty for his livestock but it was a place of spiritual desolation.

There was nothing there for his soul. His neighbours in Sodom did not fear the Lord. They degraded themselves in sexual immorality.

Lot lost everything even his own dignity as he ended up his days on a desolate mountain side.

Whereas Abraham prospered and enjoyed the honour of being regarded as a prince by the Hittites in whose land he was living.

And the final point is this that on our journey we are to invite others to join with us. And that's just what Moses did. He invited Hobab, his brother-in-law, to join with him.

The Israelites were passing through. They were the Lord's people. There was a destination to which the Lord was ultimately guiding them. And they were to conduct themselves accordingly.

[24 : 04] They were not to plunder the lands through which they were passing. They were not to help themselves to that which belonged to others. They were not out to conquer but they were seeking permission from the various kings of the countries through which they were passing.

And as we journey on we are called to make our Christian presence felt. We're called to lift our light and not hide it away.

You are the light of the world, Jesus says to his people. And that light is to be placed on a pedestal so that others can see it. We are not to hide our Christian faith.

We are not to hide the fact that we do not go along with the moral ineptitude of the western world in which we live. Our ways are not the ways of the world just as God's ways are not the ways of the world.

We are if we are Christians a priesthood of all believers. we have a responsibility to share the gospel with others on our journey.

[25 : 13] And in doing so we are inviting them to come and join with us on that pilgrimage that will ultimately end in God's heavenly home.

Paul the Pharisee was filled with a zeal for Judaism. But when he came to know the Messiah then his greatest desire was that his fellow Jews would also come to know Jesus as their saviour and Lord.

And we must in our own day and age remember God's ancient people because the promises for God's ancient people still stand and the day will come when the scales will be taken from their eyes and they will come to see that this Jesus who Christians have been worshipping for 2,000 years he is the Messiah.

He is the Lord's anointed one. We need wait no longer. In Romans 10 Paul said brothers my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they be saved.

The man who was healed of demon possession Jesus said in Mark 5 go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

[26 : 31] He did so and all the people were amazed. Our desire should be firstly for the members of our family those who are closest to us those whom we love.

Of course Hobab had been a brother-in-law to Moses for 40 years. He would have loved him as a brother. He pleaded with him please do not leave us but come with us and the good things that the Lord will give us you will enjoy them as well.

Moses knew that only in the company of the Lord's people would he enjoy and share the good things that God had promised to his people.

Their inheritance would become Hobab's also. When we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ we don't tag along as camp followers. We are invited into his family.

We are grafted in to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are adopted into God's family. We become co-heirs with Christ Jesus.

[27 : 37] Notice here in verse 31 that Hobab was given a task and Moses said please do not leave us for you know where we should camp in the wilderness and you will serve as eyes for us.

He was given a task and every single job done on behalf of the Lord is a special job. You might think that what you are doing for the Lord is not important but my friend whatever you do for the Lord it is important.

This man Hobab knew the desert. Many years ago when I was young and in the oil industry I was working in the Sahara desert and some of the seismic crews that I used to visit were sometimes as much as 200 kilometers away.

from the nearest road and I remember setting off one day and I had with me a man of the desert. He was a Bedouin and he was my eyes and he was my ears and when we left the tarred road and we started heading off across the dunes and across the wilderness I had no idea where we were going.

I had a compass bearing but every so often he would tell me to stop and he would get out and he would sniff the air and he would look up at the stars and he would climb back into the cab and he would go like that and we couldn't speak the same language to one another and on we would go for several hours and then he would stop again and he would get out and he would sniff the air and he would look at the stars and he would go like that and he took us unknowingly to the very place where we wanted to go 200 kilometers over trackless desert and sand dunes without any signs whatsoever.

[29 : 26] If it had not been for him I would still be there today trying to find my way out. And so Hobab was like that. He was a man who knew the desert.

We sing in Psalm 84, I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. There is no such thing as a menial task done on behalf of the Lord.

Every task is important. Have we made ourselves available to the Lord? In Isaiah God said whom shall we send?

Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Said the Lord. Here I am, send me, said Elijah. Isaiah. Are we equally willing to serve the Lord in whatever capacity he wants us to serve him and wherever he wants to serve him?

And here on our journey we have many tokens of God's amazing and inestimable grace. But whatever blessings we receive in this life, whatever blessings we enjoy on our earthly pilgrimage, the best is yet to come.

[30 : 40] Yes, we sometimes experience the bitterness of Marah and other times we enjoy the refreshing tranquility of the springs of Elim.

But the Lord God is leading his people to a place of eternal rest, a place of joy and a place of bliss. That is our ultimate goal when we will join with God in his Sabbath rest.

God is leading us to still waters and green pastures. He guides us in the paths of righteousness. He will one day take us through the valley of the shadow of death.

We will fear no evil for he will be with us. He prepares a table for us. He anoints us with oil. He fills our cup and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Journey's end. I hope and trust and pray that every single one of us here today will meet up in that place of inestimable bliss.

[31 : 44] And we will do if we should trust ourselves fully to the Lord Jesus Christ and to him and to him alone. Amen. May the Lord add his blessing to these thoughts and meditations on his word.

Shall we pray? Lord,