

Talk 4 - Persuading the Listener

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[0 : 01] Good afternoon everybody and it's great that you've come. This will be a quick session and I'll try and do my best to keep you awake. After this, quite soon after this, I'll hop in my car and go home. So I want to say a very big thank you for having me.

Tomorrow I'm in a morning service with my own little church and then I'm taking Christianity Explained for a lot of unbelievers. And in the evening I'm preaching at a church near my house. So I've just managed to come for this 24 hours and loved it.

It's been great to be with you. I'm going to pray a little prayer which I learned from my boss, Dick Lucas. It's actually an old Anglican prayer. You may have heard it before and I always find it helpful. So let's bow our heads.

Heavenly Father, we pray that what we know not, you would teach us. And what we have not, you would give to us. And what we are not, you would make us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

So we're in our fourth session. If you want to turn to the outline in your little booklets. It's called Persuading the Listener. Anybody here old enough to have been to hear Billy Graham? A few. Anybody here meet Billy Graham? Wonderful. Yeah.

[1 : 19] I was invited by ABC to go with some students from Moore College to a group that were going to be a panel of students. And he was going to answer questions. Students asking Billy Graham questions.

And the compere, the guy who was chairing it, came up to the three of us from Moore College and he said, I am a new believer. So I am on side.

But almost everybody here among the students is against him. So when you have a question, put your hand up and I'll make sure you get to ask your question.

So I had the great privilege of asking him a question on national television. And I'd read this in his biography that when he was a young man at theological college, he'd fall into great doubts about the Bible.

But he was getting all these invitations to preach the Bible. So he went out into the field, some of you may know this, and he laid his Bible on a stump. And he knelt down beside the stump and he said, Dear God, I don't know whether I should trust this book or whether I should preach it or whether I should give up on it.

[2 : 28] But I'm going to keep preaching it and I'm going to trust that it's your word from cover to cover and stop me if I'm on the wrong track. And he said, even as he prayed this, there was a great sense of peace.

And almost immediately, he got his invitation to the big Los Angeles crusade, which became massive. And everything went from there. When I was leaving the ABC studio, he was talking to a girl who was really angry with him.

And he was patiently listening to this girl. And I thought, I'm not going to leave here without touching the great man. So I just stuck my hand into the middle of the conversation and he went like this.

And kept talking to the girl. Well, I've never washed my hand since. And he was a great persuader. He had the ability, especially in the 50s, where Sydney was very churched.

And then a little bit less in the 60s and a little bit less in the 70s. But he had the ability to persuade people who knew enough about Jesus but had never responded to step over the line.

[3 : 33] It was just a gift from God. And some of his talks were really quite unusual. I mean, he gave a talk once on the family, which was just full of humour and fun.

And then he said, and some of you can't do this work in the family. And I'm going to ask you to get up and give your life to Jesus. And of course, most of the people who were sitting there knew that Jesus had lived and died and rose.

And they got up and said, it's time for me to respond. This fantastic gift of persuading. And that's what we come to in Deuteronomy in the last chapters. That Moses is a great persuader.

We've seen the recap of the trip so far. We've seen the chapters on the covenant relationship. We've seen a little bit of the details of what it means to unpack the commandments.

And now there comes the moment where Moses says, make your decision. Which way will you go? Now, we know that persuasion is a work of God.

[4 : 30] Ephesians 2, we're dead in our sins until God wakes us. But he uses people. And sometimes he uses the great one like Billy Graham.

Sometimes he uses the ordinary one like us. Because we just say something. And sometimes it's very winsome. Come to church with me.

Just come once. And the person comes and they, in the providence of God, come to believe. Sometimes we can say something which is a little sharper. So there was a lady in my previous church who was not a believer.

And she was in a queue for Woolworths. And the lady behind her turned to her and said, are you coming to my church? And she said no. And the lady said, oh, that's right. You've got a God called money, haven't you?

And went off with her groceries. The lady said she was so angry. And then she went home and thought, I have a God called money. She's absolutely right. And that's what led to the conviction.

[5 : 26] And that's what led to the conversion. So the Lord uses us. He doesn't, he can persuade and change anybody in a moment. But he tends to use us as his instruments. And that's what Moses is doing now.

He's an instrument. And he tells the people in Deuteronomy 27, this is on your outline. If you've got your outline there. Not quite sure what I did with my outline.

He begins by talking about the pros and the cons. We're looking at chapters 27 to 34. And he tells the people that when they crossed the Jordan, chapter 27, they had to set up 12 large stones or rocks on the side of the river that they've crossed to.

Now, I presume these big 12 rocks came out of the river. I presume they were to remind the people, you couldn't have dived in for these rocks.

They had to be lifted out when the Lord stopped the river and you crossed. And the 12 rocks were therefore a reminder of a miraculous crossing.

[6 : 34] But they were to paint the 12 rocks white. And they were to put the law on the 12 rocks. Maybe that means the commandments and a bit more.

And as they entered the land itself, remember, there were going to be two mountains like doorposts. One of them is called Mount Gerizim and one of them is called Mount Ebal. Somebody is to stand on Gerizim and call out the blessings of following the Lord.

Someone is to stand on Ebal and call out the curses. And I understand from my reading that Gerizim was a very green and beautiful mountain. And Ebal was a very barren and rocky mountain.

And so they visually as well as verbally said, life or death. Now, as we come into chapter 27, we didn't read this.

So I'm just telling you, there then is a list of curses that will happen to you if you turn away from the living God. And remember that what we're talking about here is either turning from the living God and being disciplined to be brought back.

[7 : 40] Or turning from the living God because you've apostatized and you will die. And the Lord never plays the game of saying, turn away, it'll be fine.

He says, if you turn away, it'll be terrible. Of course, he may bring us back. He often does bring us back. But we wouldn't want to say to anybody, turn away and play with rebellion.

Because we don't know where the trajectory leads. Now, the general curses in chapter 27 are very general. It doesn't exactly say what will happen. In chapter 28, however, the blessings are very specific.

This is under my first heading of pros and cons. The cons are general curses. You know, it will go badly for you. It will not be good for you. When you get to the blessings of chapter 28, they're very specific.

You'll have crops. You'll have herds. You'll have victories. You'll have prosperity. You'll have rain. When you get to the end of chapter 28, the curses are very specific. They're the opposite.

[8 : 48] Things like failure, poverty, barrenness, disease, dust, defeat, captive idolatry, siege, despair. And the curses are relentless.

The blessings are the first 14 verses. The curses are verses 15 to 68. And what God is doing with these curses is he's saying, if you turn away from me, the creation will turn against you.

It'll be like going back to Egypt. And, you know, there'll be darkness and there'll be locusts and it'll be dreadful. And he says there will be anxiety. You'll get to sleep and you won't be able to sleep.

You'll wake up in the morning and you'll wish it was nighttime. Such a realistic warning. Now, does all this have any bearing on us today?

Do we read this and think, well, this is dreadful? You know, I'm a Christian. I'm going to be disobedient. Does that mean I'll suddenly be completely bankrupt? Does it mean I'll suddenly get diseases?

[9 : 50] Does it suddenly mean I'll become a captive? Does it suddenly mean I'm going to die? We're not meant to read the literalness of these curses into the Christian life. This was very much for Israel.

Walk with the Lord, outward blessings. Turn away from the Lord, outward cursings. And we need to remember also that the Lord Jesus has taken, as I say, the curse for us.

So that these curses cannot undermine our salvation. He came, Galatians 3, to be a curse for us.

So when we have trouble in our Christian life, because the Lord is disciplining us, it may humble us to go back to him. But curses and wrath are no more for the Christian.

They are for the unbeliever. And of course, for the unbeliever, it's much worse to turn away from the living God than it is to just get some famine or some poverty.

[10 : 52] Why are the blessings so brief and the curses so long in Deuteronomy? Is God sadistic? Does he actually like curses more than blessings? I think the answer is that they are both gifts from God.

But it's like the mother who says to the little boy, wait outside the school gates and I'll be there at 3.15. And then she says, don't walk away from the gate.

Don't get a lift with a stranger. Don't forget that I said I'd meet you. Don't think of walking home. Don't forget that she's given more warnings than the one command to be at the gate.

Not because she doesn't love him. Because she's so concerned that he doesn't fall into various dangers. And I think that's the way we must think of this as we think of the living God.

The second point is warning and wooing. And these are beautiful chapters. Deuteronomy 29 and 30. We had a little bit of 30 read for us. And they reach their goal in chapter 30 verse 19, which is choose life.

[11 : 58] And this is where Moses the evangelist is saying, I want you to live. The Lord wants you to live. He wants to bless you. Just as Joshua, remember, said, choose this day whom you'll serve.

And Elijah said, which way will you go? And Jesus said, choose the narrow road, not the broad road. And Moses is asking people to make a decision.

He actually asks them to dedicate their life to God or rededicate it. And he has two negative reasons for choosing God. One, I don't want you to fall into decline.

The other, I don't want you to become a byword among the nations. He has two positive reasons for choosing God in chapter 30. God will use you for great good.

And God will strengthen your faith. He says in chapter 29 verse 2, You saw when you were children great wonders from God, but you don't get it.

[13 : 03] You haven't understood. You need a regenerating work to take place in your heart. Do you know that story of the man who's out of work and he sees a job going at the zoo?

Do you know this story? And he turns up and he says, I'm out of work. I'll be glad for a job. And they say, we're actually short one gorilla. And we need somebody to put on the gorilla costume and step into the cage.

So he's completely lost for work. And so he says, okay, I'll do it. And he puts on the gorilla suit and he gets into the cage. And after a few days, he hates it. And he says to himself, as soon as the cage opens, I'm going to leave.

And so the cage opens and he runs out as fast as he can in his gorilla suit, running across the grounds of the zoo. And he's looking over his shoulder to see if anybody's chasing him. And as he looks over his shoulder, he slips over a rail and falls down into this huge pit.

And as he's lying on the bottom of the pit, he wakes up a bit stunned. And he realizes he's in the lion's den. And a couple of the big lions come towards him slowly, menacingly. And he thinks to himself, what will I do?

[14 : 06] Will I call out, I'm not really a gorilla, I'm a man, and get into big trouble? Or will I just lie here and get eaten? And he thinks, well, I've got to call out. So he calls out in a loud voice. Say, hey, I'm not a gorilla. I'm not a gorilla. I'm just a man in a gorilla suit trying to make a few dollars.

Please help, help, help. And the lions come closer and closer, huge jaws. And he calls out, help, help, help, help. And one of the lions opens his mouth really wide and says, lower your voice, pal, or we'll all lose our jobs.

And why am I telling you that? Because it's 2.30 in the afternoon and you're looking sluggish. But I'm also wanting to remind you that the Christian life is not a skin. You can't just put it on.

You can't just fake it. There needs to be a life put inside you. And Moses is aware that these people going into the land will finally need a life. Of course they've got to respond to what they know.

But they're going to need a life. So he's appealing to them. He's appealing to them, take God seriously. And he warns them again about the idols and says, I don't want you to die.

[15 : 10] I don't want you to be a joke to the nations. He's at his creative best in this chapter. And I wonder if you've ever read before 29.29. Does anybody know Deuteronomy 29.29 off by heart?

I'm sure you've heard this before. The secret things belong to the Lord our God. The things revealed are for us and our children. Have you heard that verse before?

It's a most wonderful verse. In other words, we must be dogmatics. Secret things belong to the Lord our God. Sorry, we must be agnostics.

There are secret things we don't know. And we must be dogmatics. Things revealed are for us and our children. There are some things we don't know. We can't explain exactly why the floods took place.

We can't explain why the war is going on in the Ukraine. There's a lot of things we can't quickly answer. But we do know a lot that the Lord has told us. And Moses finishes Deuteronomy 29.29 by saying to the people, listen, you don't know everything.

[16 : 17] But you know enough to know to respond to God. Don't pretend that you've got to know everything before you can respond to God. I think this would be a great verse to preach at an evangelistic service.

We don't know everything. But we know enough to know to take God seriously. And it's a great verse, of course, to preach in the context of suffering. Because so often we have to say to people who suffer, we do not know why this has happened.

I'm not going to pretend to give you some slick and superficial answer. But I will say this. We know that God is good. We know that God is great. We know that God is on the throne. We know that he's familiar with suffering.

We know that he works things for good. We know that he will actually bring good out of this. So we're going to hold on to what we know. And we're going to sit loose to what we don't know. We'll be dogmatic and agnostic at the same time.

That's what Moses is saying here. And then he says in chapter 30, and this is the section that we read. You don't need to climb to heaven to find out what God has said. You don't need to cross the seas to find out what God has said.

[17 : 20] The word has come to you. It's near you. No wonder Paul quotes this in Romans chapter 10. You don't need to climb a ladder to find out what God is like. You don't need to cross the oceans to find out what God is like.

God has come down to you. God has come across to you. It's all in front of you in Jesus. No wonder Moses is quoted by Paul.

And Moses signs his signature at the end of chapter 30 and says, choose life because the Lord is your life. So that's the warning and the wooing. The third thing is death and judgment.

We're nearly there. This is the chapter where he hands over to Joshua, calls on the people to be courageous, calls on Joshua to be courageous. He says the law is to be read regularly every seven years.

And then God speaks to Moses and Joshua. And he says to them, I want you to know you've got to face the facts. The people are going to turn away from me. It's not going to be all great. And so I want you to write a song, chapter 32.

[18 : 24] And it is a very sobering song. It's basically a lament. I had a godson who died a couple of years ago at the age of 29 after 12-year battle with leukaemia.

And it wasn't the leukaemia that killed him. The leukaemia was kept under control because of two bone marrow transplants. But he got graft-versus-host disease.

And so his body fought the bone marrow, which was keeping the leukaemia at bay. And so this very fine boy who'd been captain of his school and captain of rugby and captain of cricket and captain of athletics and captain of swimming, he was a keen Christian boy.

He just for 12 years turned into a physical monster. So his face was all puffy and red and his skin was cracking all over the place.

And he was bleeding and he couldn't walk on his feet. And he had 30 to 40 mouth ulcers in his mouth. And he had no tears in his eyes. And he just declined in front of us.

[19 : 29] It was absolutely horrendous. And his sister said to him, what's the hardest part of coming to church? And he said, it's singing the happy songs.

And she wrote a lament for him. And the psalms, of course, are full of laments. Where you actually look suffering in the face and feel it.

And she wrote this song, coming to grips with suffering, so that he could sing it and say, this is me. And the song of Deuteronomy 32 is a lament.

It begins by saying, we're going to remember our sins. We're going to remember his mercy. We've been rebellious. He's had to rescue us again and again. We've rejected him.

Thankfully, God will relent. And we can rejoice. I've turned it into six or seven R's. Remembrance, rebellion, rescue, rejection, relent and rejoice.

[20 : 29] And they were to sing this song as a reminder to them that they were not a godly people. But God was a very gracious saviour. And they were to sing this, especially, I guess, when they turned away.

So that's the death and the judgment. The last bit is the great hope, chapter 33 to 34, where Moses blesses the tribes. Do you remember when Jacob blessed his 12 sons in Genesis and said something specific to each one?

Now Moses gathers the tribes and he has something to say to each of them. And then he has one thing to say to all of them. And I'm just going to read to you and you can follow with me. Deuteronomy 33, 26 to 29.

This is what Moses says to all the tribes. Chapter 33, 26 to 29. He says, There is no one like the God of Jeshurun.

That's another name for Israel. There's no one like the God of Israel. Who rides the heavens to help you. And in his excellency on the clouds.

[21 : 43] The eternal God is your refuge. And underneath are the everlasting arms. He will thrust out the enemy from before you and will say destroy.

Then Israel shall dwell in safety. The fountain of Jacob. In a land of grain and new wine. His heavens shall drop dew.

Happy are you, O Israel. Who is like you? A people saved by the Lord. The shield of your help. And the sword of your majesty. Your enemies shall submit to you.

And you shall tread down their high places. And that's his blessing to the 12 tribes. And the thing I love about it is that it is so nice. He could have finished by saying, You've been an absolute pain in the neck.

But he finishes by saying, How good is your God? And how good is he to you? So he says, There's nobody like God. Literally, Jeshurun is the upright one.

[22 : 45] What a special name to give to Israel. And Moses says, This God rides to help you. He takes initiative. And he needs to take initiative.

Because often you don't take initiative. He's not inactive. He's not reluctant. He's active, not passive. He is thinking ahead of you. I don't know what you're going back to.

But the Lord is going ahead of you. He goes ahead of his people. Next week I'm taking the funeral of a Russian lady who killed herself because of her despair at the situation of her people in Russia.

And she killed herself by buying a large quantity of methylated spirits and tipping it over her head and setting herself alight. So I'm going back to that funeral this week.

And I don't know what you're going back to. Many struggles and many things to think about. And how wonderful to know the Lord goes ahead of us. And he's your refuge.

[23 : 48] Verse 27. The idea that he is up there and we are down here needs to be rethought because he's around us. He's above you and he's around you.

He embraces you. Verse 27. He's underneath you. Underneath of the everlasting arms. You cannot sink into sadness lower than his arms.

You can't sink into humiliation lower than his arms. You can't sink into trial lower than his arms. You can't sink into death lower than his arms.

His arms, unlike Moses, that got weary, do not get weary. And he's ahead of you. He faces enemies. He's aware of your fights. He's not sleeping in a bed.

He is a fighter. And all of this language of God being above and around and ahead of us and underneath us is a preview of the privilege of the Christian of being in Christ.

[24 : 47] which is that great and favourite phrase of the Apostle Paul. We are to remember, of course, that the Lord Jesus fought a fight at the cross where he disarmed the principalities and the powers and caused a very great victory which we can hardly begin to fathom.

So, let me finish with a quote from C.H. Spurgeon, one of my heroes, as we come to the end of our little walk through Deuteronomy. Spurgeon says on chapter 33, 27, if you had 50 kingdoms burdening your brain, if you carried the politics of a hundred nations or were loaded with the cares of a thousand worlds, you can safely leave them with the wonderful counsellor and go on your way rejoicing.

So lean hard, brothers and sisters, because underneath are the everlasting arms. It's a great Spurgeon. Great. We finished. I'll pray a short prayer.

We thank you, our gracious God, for putting into the fellowship of your people a shepherd like Moses, one who would plead, persuade, teach, love.

but we especially thank you for the good shepherd, for his perfection, for his love, for his victory, for his faithfulness, for his promises, for his sufficiency, for his care of us.

[26 : 27] Pray that you would help us and all whom we love to know and to walk with this Saviour. we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.