

Talk 1 - Looking back... to look forward

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[0 : 0 0] And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and rules that I am teaching you and do them, that you may live. And go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor.

For the Lord your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal Peor. But you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive today. See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples. Who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us? Whenever we call upon him. And what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

[1 : 2 3] Only take care and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.

Make them known to your children and your children's children, how on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, that they may teach their children so.

And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.

You heard the sound of words, but saw no form. There was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform. It is the Ten Commandments.

And he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.

[2 : 3 3] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Everybody, if you're welcome. We're going to just pray and ask the Lord to help us.

It's been a long week. It's been long weeks, long months. We need his strength, his help. So let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Our gracious God, we thank you for bringing us safely to this place.

We thank you for the word, which has blessed and helped so many over so many centuries. we thank you for your Holy Spirit able to illumine encourage, convict strengthen and we pray that as we spend these few minutes in this portion of your word that you would help us to see great things and in your goodness to live in the light of them we ask it in Jesus name Amen I don't know if you've heard the story before of Tiger Woods and Stevie Wonder meeting in a pub have you heard this story before?

just indicate if you've heard this before so do you know who I'm talking about? Stevie Wonder is the blind black musician and Tiger Woods is the probably nearly finished golfer and they meet in a pub and Stevie Wonder, the blind musician says to Tiger Woods you know when my drive, my golf drive is off my whole game is off and Tiger Woods said what are you talking about?

you're blind, you can't play golf and Stevie Wonder said of course I can and I get my caddy to wait down the fairway and he calls to me and I drive towards him and when we get to the green he stands behind the pin and calls to me and I putt towards him and I'm doing well he said I'm playing off scratch which is fantastic and Tiger Woods said that's amazing we must have a game sometime and Stevie Wonder said well nobody takes me seriously so I won't play for less than a thousand dollars a hole and Tiger Woods thinks for a minute and he says let's do it and Stevie Wonder says and this is the punchline you pick a night I tell you that because given that you and I walked blindly down the road we did not know what was coming in 2022 and a whole lot has unfolded which is completely bewildering would it not be great since there are so many voices in our heads and around us and in social media and friends powerful voices would it not be great if there was one voice that just called to us and we could walk towards it and be safe and that's what we have in the scriptures and that's why the plan for the talks is to look at this great book of Deuteronomy you've also been given a outline in this little booklet and I wonder if you would turn to see talk one looking back to look forward and I'm resting my watch on the lectern here so that we won't be long

[5 : 38] I'll try to be quick I realise you may be very weary thank you for inviting me it's a great thing to look at this book this is Moses preaching on the edge of the promised land so it couldn't be more urgent and it couldn't be more wonderful and if you're not very familiar with the Old Testament we've said goodbye to Adam and Eve we've said goodbye to Noah we've said goodbye to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob the people have gone into Egypt in slavery Moses has been raised up to lead them out they've gone across the Red Sea they've come to Mount Sinai been given the Ten Commandments and hopelessly compromised and God has led them as a kind of a discipline for 40 years in the wilderness so that they would learn to listen to him and now most of those people who wandered in the wilderness as adults have died and it's the children who've grown up who are now in their 40s 50s and maybe 60s standing on the edge of the promised land and Moses is speaking to them and he's saying you must listen to the word of God look at what your forefathers did but you're about to enter in the promised land this is the time to listen because if you don't listen everything will go wrong now I hasten to say that Deuteronomy is a grace driven book do you know what I mean by that it's not teaching you that if you obey the rules you will get into God's salvation

Moses is saying to the people you're a saved people and I want you to obey the God who saved you not to get into his good books but because you are in his good books it's a grace driven book and we're told in chapter 1 that God is the God who rescued them and we're told in chapter 2, 3 and 4 that he like a father has carried them like a child through the wilderness a father to a child not a dictator to a servant a father to a child you can get a handle on Deuteronomy if you listen carefully to these next few seconds the first four chapters that we're going to look at tonight very quickly are basically looking back what's happened the second chapters 5 to 11 are basically this is what our relationship means the third section 12 to 26 is these are some practical ways to be obedient and the last section is make a decision so imagine I was a dictator and I had just conquered you and I'm about to give you a treaty of how things will work and I say to you this is what happened

I won the battle this is what our relationship looks like this is how I want you to be in your life behaviour wise and it's time for you to make a decision that's the book of Deuteronomy in a nutshell I once gave these talks to adults and I had to go down and speak to the children's teachers every afternoon and they said to me how are we possibly going to teach Deuteronomy to children and so we came up with the mnemonic which was M-I-C-E Moses preached Deuteronomy Israel failed Deuteronomy Jesus practiced Deuteronomy everyone who belongs to him is safe does that make sense Moses preached it Israel failed Jesus practiced it everybody who belongs to him is safe it's a very weighty book as I mentioned one writer says Deuteronomy provides the theological basis for virtually the entire Old and New Testament and Christ is magnified in the book because it's the book that he read he practiced and it's the one where because of his obedience he's become our savior here are some lines that come in Deuteronomy do not be afraid the Lord will fight for you what other people has a God so near to them do not put your God to the test it was because the Lord loved you that he chose you he defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow teach your children as you sit walk and lie down don't think

I'll be safe if I go my own way when you return to me says the Lord I will have compassion and I will restore you choose life so you and your children may live these words are not idle words but your life the eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms all of these are lines in the great book of Deuteronomy it's a great great book so let's look at the outline the road so far chapter 1 which we didn't read is where Moses basically says let's recap the journey and if you would just turn to chapter 1 I just want to read you the first couple of verses and you'll see what he says chapter 1 verse 1 of Deuteronomy these are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness in the plain and he said verse 3 it came to pass in the 40th year in the 11th month on the first day of the month Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all the Lord had given him his commandments to them and a little bit further on if you go down it says verse 11 and I spoke to you at that time saying

I alone am not able to bear you the Lord your God has multiplied you and here you are today as the stars of heaven in multitude and he also says to them in the early first few verses he says you know we should have arrived at this promised land after about 11 days but it's taken 40 years it's taken 40 years because of disobedience so Moses is looking back in chapter 1 and he reminds them that they've left Mount Sinai that they chose some leaders together that they sent spies into the promised land that the spies were rebellious in their report and the Lord made his decision to send them through the wilderness now God's been very gracious to them in the wilderness we discover in chapter 8 he's fed them he's taught them he's clothed them he's kept their shoes he's provided water there's one passage in Deuteronomy that says your sandals did not wear out one million

[12 : 28] Israelites walking through the desert and the God of the universe made sure that the sandals of the Israelites did not wear out for 40 years well we need to look also back if we're to understand the future I hope you know this I hope you know that as you go forward and you say to yourself I wonder if the future will be safe I wonder if I will arrive one day with Christ I wonder if he'll say to me welcome the key to that looking forward is to look back and say yes there on the cross he died for me and as I look back in my mind to that hill good Friday 3pm first good Friday I say that's where he called out it's paid and therefore I go forward with confidence confidence because of what he's done for me a huge part of the Christian life is learning to look back to what Christ did and what God has said and a great deal of problem living in the

Christian life is not remembering what's happened but pressing on fearfully we read in Psalm 77 I cried to God for help in distress and then he says I'll remember the deeds of the Lord of the past 2 Corinthians 5 we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ but Christ became sin for us or think of Christmas the people come to Christmas the first coming has already taken place one day they're going to meet Christ at the second coming how are they going to be ready for the second coming by understanding the first coming a huge key to the Christian life is looking back of course there are some times we look back badly guiltily but there is a good looking back to what God has said and what Jesus has done that's chapter 1 chapter 2 is what I've called pick your fights in chapter 2 he looks back on the journey and he reminds them that there were people on the journey who they are not to fight

I won't go in the details of it but just to say that as they travelled and as they get near to the promised land they're not to fight certain tribes they're not to fight the Edomites the Moabites and the Ammonites does anyone know why not yeah that's helpful they're all their relatives yeah they've come through the tribe of they go they go back to Abraham and so they're not to fight their relatives even though their relatives are dodgy they're not to fight them but they were to fight two kings who had the unusual names of Sihon and Og and the reason they fought them is that those two kings were like doorposts into the promised land and God said you will fight those two and you will win a victory over those two before you enter the promised land and that victory over those two kings will be a prediction and an encouragement to you that you're going to make it and so he gave them a battle a

God-given battle I want to hasten to say and we'll come back to this again that when this book talks about fighting and people say well that's what the Bible is like isn't it the Old Testament it's all just bloodshed vindictive God doesn't care really bloodshed bloodshed I want to remind you that all that takes place around the entry to the promised land is pretty unique warfare it's the taking of the promised land the taking of it and the thorough taking of the promised land and we mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that the Old Testament is just full of battles there's a very specific and great battle which is taking the promised land and as we'll see later in the weekend God had given this particular promised land 400 years to turn to him as somebody has said if you want to wage a war wait 400 years to see if things improve and he'd warned them and they had not turned they had not given up their idolatry they'd heard of

Yahweh they'd heard of the escape from Egypt they've heard of the crossing of the Red Sea they'd heard of him looking after the people in the wilderness they had heard that a million Israelites had come safely through the wilderness but they were not going to turn to Yahweh and so because it's his land and he's promised it to his people and he executes a judgment which of course he is the judge but it's not a common thing it's a one-off never to be repeated battle and it's a very God centered battle it's all about what God says it's not about bloodthirsty people deciding that they'll invade their neighbours read my lips okay so there are a couple of people who they defeat as an encouragement and Moses reflects on this fighting and he says this was helped by God enabled by God and now he says with great clarity chapter 2 verse 37 this was in accordance with the command of God well it's a very great thing when the church teaches clearly the task of the church we are under tremendous pressure as local churches to change the agenda to suit the applause of the world and I don't know if you've seen the book by Kevin de Young called

[18:09] What is the Mission of the Church but he argues in the book that back in the 1970s where the church started to talk about mission and serving everything got confused because mission means a thousand things to people and serving means a thousand things to people and what we needed was somebody to clarify that the mission of the church is the commission of the church make disciples and the serving is serving the Lord by helping people believe and be safe for eternity and that's the great mission of the church we have to be very careful that we're not just afraid of the world listening to what they tell us to be enthusiastic about when Christ has said make disciples and then he says I'm with you always so we're always thankful for those people who've got an eye to eternity remember John Piper said we don't want anybody to suffer but we especially don't want people to suffer eternally and that's the great motivation for our task and as

Moses talks about the mission of God's people the mission of God's people is to go in and take the promised land and the mission of God's people today it's not climate change it's not creation care it's not a whole range of things it's helping people come to Christ and live so in chapter four sorry chapter three we come to what I've called looking ahead and what this chapter is all about is that some of the land on the east side of the river that's not the promised land is to be given to some of the tribes some of the tribes the Reubenites the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh are to be given some land on the east side of the Jordan the land on the west is going to be taken by everybody and divided up among the other nine and a half tribes in chapter three Joshua is appointed as the one who will lead the trip over the river into the promised land Joshua is to be the one who takes them in Moses is told you're not going to travel across the river into the promised land you can climb the mountain says God and you can look at the promised land but you're not going to go in why didn't

Moses go in anybody know because he struck the rock and that's what we're told in the book of Exodus it was obviously a public piece of disobedience which was very serious because he was basically saying I'm your leader I've been telling you to trust God but we can't really trust him so I'm going to have to whack the rock but in Deuteronomy good old Moses says it's your fault that I'm not going into the promised land so he becomes the patron saint of pastors who blame their congregations and I think he's probably right in saying that he's not going in because they aggravated him to sin and so there is a sort of an element of truth in both reports he whacked the rock and the people provoked him but Moses is not going to lose his soul we know that he's not perished how do we know he's not perished where did he reappear Mount of Transfiguration thank you there he was alive and well on the

Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and there Jesus met with the two great leaders to show that he was safe and sound just because he didn't get into the promised land the dirt of the promised land doesn't mean he lost his soul or his salvation the promised land very wonderful but something infinitely more wonderful and if you don't mind me saying one of the great problems with the Middle East today is that there's not enough gospel which would liberate a lot of people from such a fanatical interest in grabbing soil the gospel does that the gospel helps you to be set free from the absolute preoccupation with having land and so the gospel is greatly needed in the Middle East as the great secret for bringing a real peace to the Middle East anybody here ever been to the promised land few people yeah and I was after my 30 years at North Sydney 11 couples took Kathy and myself on a trip to the promised land to Israel

I never expected to go but they took us and we stood on the mountain where Moses stood and we looked over at the land and from the top of the hill it doesn't look that great but when you get into it you realise how lush and beautiful it is but Moses didn't miss out really on anything he just missed out on walking the dirt now we come to chapter 4 are you still with me I can see one or two are still with me which is exciting now we come to chapter 4 and that's probably the most important chapter this evening and that's the passage we had read for us and this is what we read in chapter 4 verse 1 Moses says I want you to listen very carefully and I want you to do what I say because your forefathers kind of listened and didn't do and then he says in chapter 4 verse 2 don't add to the law and don't subtract does anyone know where that comes up again in the Bible in the book of Revelation yeah thank you don't add don't subtract the Pharisees as you know were great adders the Sadducees were great subtractors adders are always a nuisance

[23 : 46] Sadducees often stir the church up to rethink its foundations the most dangerous are the Pharisees because they introduce extras creating the A group and you're only in the B group and so the place gets divided and adding and subtractive are both dangerous but I suspect that adding is the most dangerous now when Moses in chapter 4 verse 6 says that their role in the promised land is to show the nations the greatness of God I want you to notice that they were not just moving in to get some milk and honey they were moving into the promised land to show that God was a great God who could do the impossible and they were to live by the word of God which would show all the nations around them that God was a wise and great God and the nations would look on and they would say what is the matter with these people they're so fair and they're so generous and they look after the weak and the poor we despise them and they would say who's their

God and the God is Yahweh now I'm saying this to you because you've got to know that they didn't go into the promised land just to have a good time they went in to be God's signposts and Peter takes this up as you know in 1 Peter when he says you are also God's chosen people a holy nation to declare the praises of him who brought you not out of the wilderness into promised land but out of darkness and into light now can I say I don't know how you as a local church affect your suburb I was 30 years in North Sydney trying to work out how does the local church affect North Sydney we had quite a nice building I don't know if you've ever seen St Thomas's North Sydney but it's like a sandstone cathedral set in beautiful green grounds and I imagine a lot of people in North Sydney and the lower North Shore said it's a nice old property must be very rich at Anglican Church but it always I scratch my head for 30 years thinking how does the church arrest the attention of the community are people going to drive past and say wow listen to that music we've got to stop the car and go in or are they going to say gee that was an attractive group walking in the building the other day we must go and meet them how is the local church going to affect the community and I came to the conclusion that it isn't the hour on

Sunday which is going to impact the world it's the group that meets for the hour on Sunday that goes into the world it's not the gathered church church which is going to cause your suburb to sit up and take notice it's the scattered people of God who are going to cause people to think again the fact that you don't swear where you work that you don't blaspheme that you take an interest in people that you talk about slightly higher things than gutter things these are the things that cause people to say he she is a nicer person a sweeter person a kinder person and eventually to discover that you're a believer and you're not a nuisance and you're not a pest and it's that door it's that living which digs up the soil and brings

God willing an opportunity for a seed to be to be landed you know that lovely passage in Colossians 4 where Paul says live wisely among the unbelievers making the most of the time especially he says get ready to answer and let your speech be gracious seasoned with salt it's a very clever text because every single believer goes to work and they must concentrate on asking the Lord that they'll be useful living wisely among the unbelievers getting ready possibly to answer how was your weekend what do you do on the weekend nothing much at door closes doesn't it went away on the weekend with my church end of sentence really you go to church I didn't think anybody with an IQ over 10 went to church no there's a few of us and little door opening because you're starting to live wisely you're answering the questions and you're trying to do it with grace and salt and living among the world which is where most of you live we pastors and clergy we're hopeless you see because we live in our offices way too long but you live in the real world and that's where you're to live wisely as the scattered people of

God helping the non-people of God learn something about God and that's what Moses is talking about well he says in chapter 4 verse 9 I'm nearly finished the listeners at Mount Sinai were children that is everybody he's speaking to in the present was a child at Mount Sinai now they've grown up and he says I want you now that you're adults to help your children who were not there at Mount Sinai to know what took place because he says you will remember that when you got to Mount Sinai God appeared in thunder and lightning and he spoke and you were frightened and you asked God not to speak and you didn't see anything just thunder and lightning you didn't see the shape of God you didn't see the look of God you didn't see the face of God you heard the voice of God and that voice that word is what you need to live faithfully for him and that's why in verse 12 the whole problem of idols is so great because if you don't have the word of

[30 : 01] God you fall into idolatry so I've been talking to somebody in recent weeks and they want to live immorally and so what they're being very careful to do is to say I'm a believer but I want to live immorally and I'm not opening the Bible in case it challenges me and I'm not going to listen to the talks you give me or the books you give me or the articles you give me because they might challenge me and that's what idolatry does it says I'm not listening I'm just making something that will suit me and as you know the idols that sneak into our lives are those things that come before Christ so just ask yourself what is more urgent for you than Christ and you're pretty close to your idol just ask yourself what's the thing that you turn to for your comfort that's often the thing which comes before Christ and that takes the place of the idol I'm not saying that's the meaning you've lost your salvation but you know that's where your battleground is now why did God not show himself in some bodily form at Mount

Sinai part of the reason was he's spirit part of the reason was anybody got any other thoughts he's too holy to be seen and live yeah Exodus very good he's spirit you cannot see me and live and the problem is once you've had a vision or a picture you can easily abuse that picture or distort that picture or change that picture but the word of God is completely clear and that's why God has presented us with the Lord Jesus we can't we don't have photos of him we don't have film of him but we've got the word telling us about his character his promises his performance because once you end up with a vision or a picture it becomes easy to distort and this of course all prepares the way for when God did come into the world in flesh and show himself to the first century people who recorded his words and his works so that we might walk by faith and not by sight well you can see as Moses speaks and the birds are enthusiasts with this you can see that as Moses speaks that he looking ahead to the future says to them in verse 25 if you do become idolatrous and you will you'll be scattered you'll be taken off into Babylon and you'll spend a long time learning the lessons again but I won't forget you says the Lord I'll bring you back and

I'll restore you you may forget me I will not forget you so the great privilege of the people of God at the end of chapter 4 verse 33 is that they have heard the voice of God nobody else none other religion has heard the voice of God speaking to them but God's people did and he spoke to them from heaven and he worked on the earth to preserve them and he loved them and he chose them and he drove out the enemies and he brought them into the promised land and there is no other God you know when the Muslim lifts up his voice to Allah there isn't an Allah sitting up there that's the tragedy he's just an invention remember how Paul talks in 1 Corinthians about how the idol is in many ways it's a nothing it could be a teapot but in another sense it's an absolute tragedy because if it captures your heart it will fail you so God has been so wonderful to us and he's interested in our welfare do you want a God who communicates turn to the

Bible do you want a God who saves you from your problems sins in the short term every problem in the long term turn to the God of the Bible do you want a God who's demonstrated that he's really loving and really faithful and really kind and really strong turn to the God of the Bible do you want a God who can change you slowly but surely turn to the God of the Bible and that's why Jesus has come lived died risen so that we might experience all this for ourselves the final bit of chapter 4 talks about the cities of refuge because the whole section finishes with there's a safe place to go if you fail and the cities of refuge were those cities that you could run to if you'd done something and were afraid of being killed for it and of course the city of refuge that we run to is Christ where we find forgiveness and welcome and safety and the proof is the cross so Douglas Murray in his book called the madness of crowds has anybody seen the madness of crowds Douglas

Murray's book he says the Western world has two problems it has no promises to bring it together there is no agreed truth and there is no mercy this is what he says he's not a believer there is no mercy when the when the fractures and the cracks appear and I read that in the book and I thought to myself what a prophetic thing to say the Western world is in deep trouble because there's nothing to bring it together and if there are cracks or breakdowns there is no mercy to get us back together and that's why everybody is so angry and hostile and on the bandwagon attacking but in the gospel promises to bring us together mercy when there are little frictions and failures and that's why we are the most blessed and privileged people because we have such a great savior so there's an introduction to the book of Deuteronomy quite fast and tomorrow we'll look at even more even faster so get a good sleep everybody I'll finish in prayer for us let's pray gracious God we thank you for giving to us this book a reminder of your goodness and your greatness a reminder of your safe keeping and your plans a reminder of your word which we can trust and our Savior who we do trust we pray that you would fill us with gratitude for all that you've made possible fixing the past fixing the present fixing the future help us to be your joyful thankful people this weekend we ask it in Jesus name amen