

# A Farewell Message of Encouragement

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Date: 13 February 2022

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn now to read from the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy. And we're going to begin reading verse 15 of chapter 30 and read on into chapter 31 down to verse 6.

For Moses, he's saying to the people just before the people move over into the promised land without Moses, this is what Moses says to the people, his farewell address to the people. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply. And the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you're entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish.

You shall not live long in the land that you're going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

[ 1 : 34 ] Therefore, choose life that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him. For he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob to give them.

So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. And he said to them, I'm 120 years old today. I'm no longer able to go out and come in.

The Lord has said to me, you shall not go over this Jordan. The Lord your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you so that you shall dispossess them.

And Joshua will go over at your head as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sion and Oc, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land when he destroyed them.

And the Lord will give them over to you. And you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous.

[ 2 : 49 ] Do not fear or be in dread of them. For it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

And may God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word as we hear again the words that Moses gave in his farewell to the people.

Two elements to his farewell where he really told them to look forward, to look forward beyond his being with them, look forward in faith. And then accompanying that, looking forward in faith, looking forward without fear.

And we'll explore these particular aspects of Moses' farewell address. We see that obviously in the particular context of this morning.

because, you know, any severing of a pastoral tie, any, you know, finishing, if you like, between a pastor and his congregation, it's not a casual manner.

[ 3 : 53 ] It's not anything light or, you know, it's not a casual thing. But obviously change will happen. You know, relationships in the Lord, relationships that have been formed over many years, they'll have changed.

They'll no longer be that direct preaching from your particular minister, no longer that direct teaching from the one whom the Lord Jesus has given to proclaim God's work to you and having done so over many years.

All the various direct communications in relation to the congregation, they'll stop and, God willing, a new man will take over. There'll be, if you like, a quitting of so much that's been built up over the years.

And it can often be that the prospect of moving forward, the prospect of change, can be really quite daunting. In many ways, from a human perspective, a lot of uncertainty.

What's going to happen in the next phase of this congregation's life? And I suppose there can be times when we can be apprehensive about the future.

[ 5 : 11 ] Maybe even fear as to what's going to lie ahead. And, you know, you're going to have to establish new links. You're going to have a new pastoral tie, God willing, in God's time.

There'll be so many elements of upheaval to deal with, to focus on. And so often, the question can be asked, will God remain faithful to his people here in this particular congregation?

Who's going to shepherd the flock when your minister leaves? And there are real challenges, challenges to your faith. But you gain comfort and you derive comfort from God's word.

And there's real comfort, real encouragement, even from this passage that we read there. Because in that passage, we find principles, general truths that can apply not just to the time here and the time of Moses, but principles that traverse the ages.

Because the principle here is the truth that God never leaves his people. However much, you know, it's a difficult time, the severing of this pastoral tie, but always remember that God is sovereign, that God's in control of his church, that God's in control of all who are his.

[ 6 : 32 ] God's purposes for his church are loving, they're perfect, they're true. His love for you is not some kind of arbitrary love. The work of the gospel will continue and pray that it will continue with joy, with purpose, with commitment, even in the weeks, the months, the years that lie ahead.

Yes, there's going to be an establishing of new pastoral ties, new pastoral links. But we pray and truly do pray that God's purposes will be revealed and that God will truly bless you as a people when, in God's time, a new shepherd is going to lead this flock.

Whether it's in relation to, well, a relatively small congregation like this or whether it's in relation to great congregations, whether it's the severing of a pastoral tie of a ministry in over 12 years or in the 40 years of Moses' leadership of God's people in the wilderness, as we say, the principle's the same.

God is sovereign. God's in control. God's purposes are never thwarted. Yes, we were saying earlier that he never changes.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God changes the times, God changes the seasons, God changes those who are in positions of authority.

[ 8 : 09 ] As we were told elsewhere in Scripture, he raises up kings, he removes kings, and he raises up those who are in particular positions of authority. We're going to see that this morning when George is inducted.

God's in control. God is in control. But be encouraged. Don't be discouraged. Be encouraged. Don't remain in any kind of state of fear or trepidation.

Have that trust in the Lord who sustains his people, who provides for his people. It's what we sing in Psalm 27. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage.

As we read here in the passage, we read in verse 6, Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread. Be afraid of them, for it's the Lord, your God, who goes before you.

And so in this, well, this last morning service, morning sermon that God has given me the privilege to bring before you, be encouraged.

[ 9 : 14 ] Be encouraged by the Word of God. This is a very particular time in the history of this church. Of course, a very particular time in the history of God's people that we read there in Deuteronomy.

Moses was severing his ties or God was severing Moses' ties with his flock. And as we said, whether it's a great leader like Moses or ministers such as myself, then there are words of wisdom here for each one of us.

Words of comfort and assurance and encouragement that when you have the prospect of a new leader to come, when there are new situations, new issues to deal with, God is with you.

God is with you. So, well, what do we find? What do we find in the passage? Well, of course, we need to think what's happening to get to this point that we read of there, Moses giving his farewell address.

Well, Moses has led his people for 40 years, God's people for 40 years and Moses is about to enter his eternal rest. All this is happening just before the people, the Israelites, cross over the Jordan to enter the promised land.

[10:38] Moses has led them for 40 years but Moses isn't going to lead them over the Jordan into the promised land. And, you know, you just imagine, use your imagination.

These people that have been led by Moses for 40 years, they've known him. They've been with him. They've received the law of God from him. they've known him as a leader, as a teacher, as someone whom God has given authority over them.

And for Moses now to tell them that he's not going to lead them over the promised land, you can just sense the people's, well, astonishment. But, that wasn't God's will.

That wasn't God's will for the people of Israel, for Moses to lead them that last stretch, as it were, from one side of the Jordan to the other. Remember, Moses had disobeyed God.

God had told him to speak to the water at Meribah for water to come forth. And Moses had struck the rock in anger. And we read in the book of Numbers that God's saying to Moses, because you didn't believe in me to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I've given them.

[11:54] and, well, God had given that work to Moses some time before. Now that time is around. The people have been led this far.

But another leader would lead them over the Jordan. And, as I said, whether it's times of Moses, whether it's the time of any congregation, it can be difficult, yes, for a congregation who's known their minister, their pastor for so many years, when the ministry has appeared to be settled.

And then, then change happens. But remember this. And always remember, the battle is the war. The work of the gospel continues.

It's not depending on one individual. And no individual is bigger than the gospel. and God's purposes will prevail and he will prevail and provide for you in his time.

So, you know, even in this time of change, the principle's there. Though we might change, though a congregation might change, God never changes.

[13:05] Yes, circumstances are changing. But God is, as we read in a saying in Psalm 46, that ever-present help in times of trouble. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He will be with you wherever you are, whoever you are, even in this congregation. He's watching over you. And, you know, don't ever forget that we worship, we serve the one who has that perfect sovereign control over his people.

He's leading you even now. He's guiding you even now. So, be courageous. Just banish that fear, if you like, even times of discouragement.

But trust in the Lord completely. He's with you at all times, in all circumstances, on all occasions.

And, as we said, that's principle to follow, whether it's in the Sinai Desert, or whether it's in Livingston, West Lothian.

it's God who's in control. Not me, not Moses. God in control. And so, that's why, as Moses gave the word of God to the people, verse 3, the Lord, your God himself, will go over before you.

[14:26] You know, this in many ways, this was a time of crisis for the people there in the desert. They had Moses as their leader. But the people have got to remember two things.

We all have to remember that it wasn't Moses who was their ultimate leader, it was God. God was their true, abiding leader. And so, on that basis, the people had to look forward in faith.

And, it's a principle that runs through the ages at any time and in any particular time. Particularly when there's to be a change of leadership amongst God's people.

God, the Lord, is your abiding leader. He is your, he's the head of his church, the head of this congregation. This is a congregation of the Lord's people.

He is the Lord, maker of heaven and earth, but he's the Lord of this particular congregation. And for all congregations, we love the Lord Jesus as Savior. And he's not going to disown you.

[15:31] He doesn't disown at a people of faith. He's your shepherd. He's going before you. And even now, he's nourishing you so that you can truly see, as we sang in Psalm 23, that you lack nothing.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want. So, the Lord himself, he's your abiding, he's your shepherd, he's your leader. And with the Lord, our Savior, as your leader, as your shepherd.

That's the case, and it is the case. He's moving ahead of you. He's moving before you. He's guiding you. He's guiding even this little thought. Follow him. Follow him in faith.

Look forward. Don't look backwards. Look forward in faith. There's not a time even to rehearse past mistakes or past errors. But there have been many that look forward in faith.

Look ahead to the work that must continue in building up the Lord's people and building up the Lord's church and proclaiming the good news of the gospel even beyond these walls.

[16:41] And pray that one day an under-shepherd will come to this very congregation. Look forward in faith. Faith in Almighty God. And when you look forward in faith, and fears disappear.

You see, the Israelites there, they were afraid. They feared the heathen neighbors around them. They were going to the promised land. There were all these enemies around them, these Canaanite enemies. But God's telling the Israelites, don't be afraid.

Just as Moses had been with them these 40 years. In these 40 years, they defeated their enemies. And the same problem, problem of enemies, God will deal with through a new leader.

And so God gives these words of encouragement, the same words that are given to you this morning, to be strong and courageous. Don't fear.

Don't fear. And so look forward. Yes, in faith, but look forward without fear. God's love. And when you read these verses again, verse 5 and verse 6, you see the name of the Lord.

[17:52] And it's a particular name. In our English versions, it's got capital letters. That's important because when you see the name Lord in capital letters, it's that name Yahweh.

That name, well, we derive Jehovah, but Yahweh. It's the name of the covenant God of Israel. And when they hear the name the Lord, Yahweh, they know they're in safe hands.

Yes, the danger's real. The Canaanite tribe, they're real enemies. They're not just a figment of imagination. But God's greater than even the greatest of his enemies.

He will prevail because he's the covenant God. He's the faithful God, the God who's faithful to his people. They weren't going to go over into the promised land on their own.

God promised to be with them just as he was with his people in the time of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He's going to be with his people in the time of Joshua and beyond.

[18:56] Yes, there were going to be many dangers, many toils, many snares. God promises that he'll be with them and deliver his people from their enemies.

Moses wasn't going to be the human instrument to lead the people. God would ensure that victory would be for those who were his.

Now, we'll bring this to application in a moment, but the people still had responsibilities. They couldn't just go into the promised land with their eyes shut and with their minds closed and their hearts detached from faith.

People had the responsibilities. There was none of this, you know, let go and let God kind of mindset. No, they had to cross the river Jordan, they had to cross in faith. They were going to have to confront these enemy tribes.

They were going to have to struggle, yes, in their faith. They weren't going to receive the promised land on a plate with absolutely no effort or commitment or, which is why God's telling the people, don't be terrified, don't be afraid.

[20:05] I mean, you know, the prospect of going over the Jordan even itself was frightening. The prospect of going into the promised land they'd never been to before, that was frightening. Without the leader of 40 years leading them, that was frightening.

But God says to the people, be strong and courageous, don't be terrified, don't be afraid. Why? Because the Lord your God goes with you. He will never leave you or forsake you.

You see, on their own, the people had absolutely no chance of success. But with God the Lord, they could move mountains. They could move those obstacles that were before them.

Okay, Moses wouldn't be their human leader, but God was their abiding leader, as we said, and God would provide a new leader for the people. God would never leave them.

He would never left them in all their times of wandering the desert, even when they turned their back in God. God never left his people. And God will never leave you. God will never leave you nor forsake you.

[21:16] So you go forward in faith. Look to the Lord your God. Look to him for his help, for his strengthening of you, for his assuring you that yes, he's with you even now.

And yes, for there are fears, for there are these prospects of even fear of what's going to happen in the future.

Well, nothing's so great that God can't give you the strength to overcome these fears. But still you have a responsibility to move forward in faith. move forward in that full trust and assurance of God never leaving you nor forsaking you.

There's a great motto that the Legion have, the Legion that I've been privileged to serve for over eight years, service not self.

And that's so true, true in life, but even in the context of the gospel, for the sake of the gospel, it's service not self. It's serving the one who came to give his life for you.

[ 22 : 27 ] It's serving the one for the sake of the gospel. It's not to draw attention to self. It's not, you know, it's nothing to do with self. It's all to do with the Lord Jesus, serving him who came and serving his father to come and gave his life for others.

And so the commandment is there, be strong, be courageous. Yes, your faith's going to be tested. It will be tested. Our faith at times will be, it has to be tested.

But in that testing of your faith, may you be stronger, stronger in faith, stronger in your trusting in your Lord and Saviour. And be strong, be strong, but strong not in your own strength, but in strength of God the Lord.

God's given you the means, he's given you the provisions to be strong. As we read there in the New Testament of the Christian armor, you're strengthened with the belt of truth, the word of truth, the belt of truth around your waist.

You've been given the breastplate of righteousness. You've been given the gospel of peace, peace that passes understanding. You've been given that sure-footed security of the Lord so that you can't withstand the devil's attack.

[ 23 : 53 ] Take up the shield of faith. Extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. You're protected by the helmet of salvation. You've got the sword of the spirit to use in that fighting the good fight of faith.

And in your constant communion with your abiding leader, the Lord or Saviour, pray. Pray in the spirit. Prayer will be bathed in prayer as you seek God's will for your future.

Pray in the spirit. And keep praying, yes, pray for all the saints. And that's the warrior. That's what the Christian warrior has, the sword of the spirit, the weapons that God gives you.

Prayer, trust, faith, truth, righteousness, peace, the word of God. And then using these weapons, love one another. You know, God uses these times of change.

He uses these, in so many instances, unexpected times of change. But he uses them for your sake. Yes, for your sake in the sense of building up your faith, deepening your commitment to him.

[ 25 : 12 ] I pray that, yes, God will lead you in strengthening your faith. And that God will draw you to himself, so that you will have a stronger faith in him.

I pray that, yes, he'll create, he'll give you that, all that you need, even for the work that God gives you in this congregation. You see, the children there in the desert, children of Israel in the desert, they were being asked, or they were being told, rather, told to be even stronger in their faith, even more courageous.

They've been with Moses 40 years. Moses is telling him, I'm not going to be with them very much longer. So the Lord's telling the people, be strong in faith. And it's the same for the Lord's people even today, even in the life of the Lord's church.

times of change do happen. Times when, in many ways, you might feel just so unprepared for.

Remember, he's with you on this journey, this journey of faith.

Remember when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven. Look what he said to his disciples. He said, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age.

[ 26 : 35 ] And yes, these words resonate with your hearts, even this morning. But he's with you always, even to the very end of the age.

The work must go on in this congregation. Pray, pray, pray for the session that has to make particular decisions. Pray for the new interim moderator, who that will be, and you'll know that very soon.

pray in all the decisions that have to be made. Pray that the Lord will bless his people with the man of his choice.

And may this congregation, those in three churches, may it flourish by the preaching of God's word. So even in these times, be encouraged.

This is my last morning preaching commitment to you. And I think I said right at the start, it's actually a great blessing to know that in a very short time now, a new elder is going to be inducted.

[ 27 : 43 ] And I've been so encouraged with that, because surely that's an indication. We saw that just a few weeks ago, new members. This is a sure indication that the work here continues, that

God hasn't abandoned you.

God is at work in this congregation. Look at these tokens, tokens of God's grace and his mercy. He's not forgotten you.

I pray then that you will know God's grace with you. You're entering a new phase in your life as a congregation. And I truly do pray that God will bless you.

He'll bless you as you move forward in faith with God with you, beside you, before you, loving you. And be encouraged that there are great things ahead, great things ahead that the Saviour has promised for you. Look to him.

[ 28 : 45 ] He's promised these great things ahead because he has done great things for you. So may God bless you, keep you, and may make his face shine upon you, and keep you safe.

Amen. Let us pray. Our loving and heavenly Father, you who shower us with your promises, who give that blessing of truth, that blessing of mercy, that blessing of love, Lord, Lord, be with your people.

May they not be discouraged, but be encouraged. May they know that even as you have been with your people over these many years of ministry here, that you promise to continue to be with your people here.

Lord, be with us even as we continue in this act of worship. Be with us, Lord, even for this next aspect of this service, with all that is to happen in the induction of our new elder.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in waiting upon you. And again, Lord, we pray your pardon for our many sins, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 30 : 10 ] Now, this doesn't happen very often, but when it does happen, it's really a great privilege. It's a privilege for the minister who carries out the act of induction.

I pray it's a privilege for the new elder. And for yourselves to watch on, and as you're watching on, in your hearts, pray, pray for George, pray for the work that this session will continue to do with George as the new elder.

But before we actually carry out the act, I'll just make sure of everything here. I'm just going to read what's happened up to this point, and then I'll ask you, George, to come up to the front here, and the elders who are here this morning will come up to the front.

I'm going to read this narrative and then I'm going to read the words of the vow that George will be taking. He'll sign the formula, I'll pray, and then there'll be the right hand of fellowship given to the new elder.

It will be done. So let me just read this first of all. By Zoom audiovisual technology, the curt session of Livingston Free Church met on Thursday 20th January 2022.

[ 31 : 36 ] It was agreed that Mr. George Coggle be appointed as an elder of the congregation with the agreement of the members of the congregation. The session having judged the aforesaid Mr. Coggle, truly qualified for the office of elder, and the said Mr.

Coggle having intimated his acceptance of office. The clerk was tasked to write to the members of the congregation and seek approval by 6 February 2022.

The curt session met on Sunday 6 February 2022 when it was confirmed that members of the congregation had duly given their unanimous agreement of Mr.

Coggle's appointment as elder and that the induction and admission to the office of elder of the said Mr. Coggle proceeded the morning service on Sunday 13th day of February 2022.

Accordingly hereby intimated that if any member of the congregation have objections to the life and doctrine of the said Mr. Coggle you'll have opportunity to do so as I've written here a meeting of session the session is still open by the way from the last meeting they've been held in Livingston Free Church on this day 13th day of February 2022 No objection George if you come up to the front here It's the first time I've been taller than you I've known George for 40 years so I've always looked up to him in that sense George Do you believe the scriptures of the

[ 33 : 31 ] Old and New Testament to be the word of God and the only rule of faith and manners Do you sincerely own and declare the confession of faith approved by former general assemblies of this church to be the confession of your faith and do you own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine which you will constantly adhere to Do you own and acknowledge the Presbyterian church government of this church by curt sessions presbyteries and general assemblies to be the only government of this church and do you engage to submit thereto concur therewith and not to endeavour directly or indirectly the prejudice or subversion thereof do you believe that the Lord

Jesus Christ as king and head of the church has therein appointed a government in the hands of church officers distinct from and not subordinate in its province to civil government and that the civil magistrate does not possess jurisdiction or authoritative control over the regulation of the affairs of Christ church and you approve of the general principles embodied in the claim declaration and protest adopted by the general assembly of the church of Scotland in 1842 and in the protest of ministers and elders commissioners from presbyteries to the declaring the views which are sanctioned by the word of God and the standards of this church with respect to the spirituality and freedom of the church of Christ and our subjection to him as her only head and to his word as her only standard you promise to observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this church as the same as are at present performed and allowed you accept the office of an elder of this congregation and promise through grace faithfully diligently and cheerfully to discharge all the duties thereof before you sign this formula let's pray our lord our god even in this solemn act of induction and admission to the office of elder of a friend or beloved new elder George Coggle we pray for him we ask lord your hand of blessing upon him we ask lord that you will give him the necessary wisdom and diligence in the undertaking of the work and the role that you've given him to do may he be a blessing to this congregation may he know your hand upon him and so lord continue with us now we pray lord we ask these things in jesus name amen and if the elders would like to come up before you sit down george there's one or two things i want to say as i said just a few moments ago i've known george for 40 years and i am absolutely delighted that george has shown his willingness to become an elder of this congregation george has been a faithful servant of the church over many years george is an experienced man he was an elder in bonacort tree church in aberdeen he's um yes he's a mature individual he's got experience in in not just in congregations but in the courts of the church and i'm truly thankful to god for this occasion on this my last sunday morning here as a in preaching uh that god has seen fit to conduct my friend george here as an elder of the congregation pray for him pray for him be encouraged in the continued work of the congregation as god leads you his people forward george