

The Breaker of Our Way

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[0 : 00] Let us now read from the Old Testament from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 31. The book of Deuteronomy, chapter 31.

And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel.

And he said unto them, I am a hundred and twenty years old this day. I can no more go out and come in. Also the Lord hath said to me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

The Lord thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee. And thou shalt possess them.

And Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the Lord hath said. And the Lord shall do unto them, as he did to Zion and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them whom he destroyed.

[1 : 18] And the Lord shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.

Be strong and of a good courage. Fear not, nor be afraid of them. For the Lord thy God, he it is, that doth go with thee.

He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him, In the sight of all Israel, be strong and of a good courage.

For thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them, and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.

And the Lord, he it is, that doth go before thee. He will be with thee. He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

[2 : 23] Fear not, neither be dismayed. Amen, and may God bless to us that reading from his truth.

Let us again sing to his praise from Psalm 37 and at verse 29. Psalm 37 and verse 29.

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[4 : 20] Psalm 37 and verse 29.

Yet him the Lord will not foresee, nor be good in his hands.

The righteous will not foresee, nor be good in his hands. The righteous will be not condemned when he in judgment stands.

Let us now turn to the passage that we read. Let us now turn to the passage that we read. The book of Deuteronomy chapter 31.

And we may take as a text, verse 8. And the Lord, he it is, that doth go before thee.

[5 : 44] He will be with thee. He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee. Fear not, neither be dismayed.

As we stand at the dawn of a new year, there is much that is hidden from us regarding what may await us or confront us in the year 2022.

And in our text today we have what I believe is a message of encouragement spoken by Moses to his successor Joshua and to the peoples of Israel.

A message that is given to Moses by the Lord. It was to be a time of change.

Not only of leadership in the nation, but also a time when Israel as a people were about to enter the land of promise.

[7 : 06] Moses was to relinquish his position and his role as leader. A role he had undertaken at the express command of God and which he had fulfilled for 40 years.

You note that we are given his age. In fact, he reminds the people of his age. And when he spoke these words, it was his birthday.

Where he says, I am 120 years old this day. I cannot help thinking that there must be some significance in mentioning his age.

Not just mention it for the sake of mentioning it. When you think about it, his life, you could say, was split into three periods of 40 years.

He spent the first 40 years in the palace of Pharaoh. He would have plenty of access. He would have access to the best education of that day.

[8 : 28] He also was in a position to use the wealth of Egypt. But as the New Testament makes plain, he rejected that.

He considered the reproach of Christ's greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. For he was looking forward to the reward, the writer to the Hebrews tells us.

And so we are told by the writer to the Hebrews that Moses made a choice. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He spent the next 40 years as a shepherd in the desert, where he received further education. But very different, I believe, from the education that Egypt provided.

It was, I believe, a time of spiritual education of a high level and intensity. And when that period of 40 years ended, God called him to the position of leadership of the Hebrew people.

[9 : 55] And I suppose everyone who reads the Bible will remember the graphic account that is given in the Bible of his call to leadership.

You remember, he was engaged in shepherding the flock. And he saw a strange phenomenon that caused him to stop to investigate.

A burning bush, and yet it was not being consumed. Behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

So here was this strange phenomenon that he saw. A fire in a bush. And you would expect the bush to be burnt up, but that wasn't happening.

And when he came near to the bush, he was instructed by God not to come too close. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

[11 : 00] He was reminded of the covenantal bond that God has to his people. I am the God of your Father. Words which also reminded Moses that he too shared in that covenantal bond.

And those who shared in that bond are never forsaken, even in death. He is their eternal God.

And Moses also heard these words, I am who I am. I am Jehovah, the covenantal king of Israel, who fulfills his promises to his people.

And you may also remember how differently Moses behaved in responding to the call addressed to him. His pride and brushness that possibly learned in the Egyptian palace was now tempered by humility.

Why do I say that his pride and brushness was tempered by humility? Well, you may remember from your Bible reading how Moses acted when he saw an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew.

[12 : 27] He killed the Egyptian. He acted proudly and brushly. He hid the body in the sand.

And he thought his crime was unknown to any. And when he realized that it was common knowledge, that was the means of his leaving Egypt.

So now when he is called by God, there is no indication of the hearty pride that characterized the younger Moses.

And that, I believe, is down to the intensity of teaching that he received shepherding the sheep in the desert. Who am I? Says the humbled Moses.

No indication of the arrogance and the pride that caused him to kill his fellow man. Who am I?

[13 : 30] He says. The forty years in the wilderness had obviously taught Moses much about himself. Who am I?

And you see, true humility is most attractive. It's not something that we have by nature. It is the product of grace.

You may say about some people, well, they were very humble. But there's no real humility until grace filters into your life.

And it is grace that produces genuine and true humility. And you remember how the Apostle Paul uses the example of Christ himself to indicate how there is true.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. So when you are at times complaining of your lot in providence, as you travel through life with all the challenges that life throws up, remember today that if you are in Christ, the Most High has his reasons.

[14 : 49] And one of the reasons for the challenges that confront you through life is that we might learn the grace of humility. And secondly, that we might learn to trust wholly on the Word of God and lean on the God of the Word.

We all, I would suggest, require to learn this valuable lesson. Well, Moses spent the third 40 years in his post as leader of the children of Israel, wandering in the wilderness, where more valuable lessons were taught and learned.

Three periods of 40 years. And so here he states, I am no longer able to go out and come in. And you might think from the statement that is made there that Moses was failing mentally and physically.

But that was not the case. We know that when he came face to face with death, his eye was undimmed and his vigor unabated.

We might be inclined to think that his age was the factor in his stepping down from his position as leader. So that when he spoke as he did, that he was merely telling the nation that he would not be with them for much longer.

[16 : 27] It wasn't a matter of age that caused him to do mid-office. He was a man who was marvelously upheld with regard to his physical health.

But the Lord had indicated to him that he must step down from his position. He was not to be permitted to enter the land of promise along with the people of Israel.

He was permitted, however, to glimpse the land that had been their goal during 40 years of wandering. So you find at the beginning of this book of Deuteronomy, go up to the top of Pisgah, lift up your eyes.

Ah, westward and northward and southward and eastwards, look at it with your eyes, for you shall not go over this Jordan. The real reason that he wasn't permitted to enter into the land of promise was because of disobedience on his part.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, because you did not 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 have given you.

[17 : 46] That was the true reason for his not being permitted to enter the land. And so, in our text today, the Lord, through Moses, is giving a word in season.

A word which contains an encouraging message for Joshua and for the people of Israel and for every person who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Irrespective of what may lie ahead. So, four thoughts from our text. First, the purposeful leadership of the Lord.

He goes before you. Secondly, the presence of the Lord. He will be with you.

Thirdly, the pledge of the Lord. He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, or he will not leave you or forsake you.

[18 : 51] And fourthly, the positive encouragement of the Lord. Do not fear, nor be dismayed.

Neither fear, fear not, neither be dismayed. So, the purposeful leadership of the Lord. He goes before you. The presence of the Lord. He will be with you.

The pledge of the Lord. He will not leave you or forsake you. The positive encouragement of the Lord. Do not fear, nor be dismayed. Firstly, the purposeful leadership.

Of the Lord. He goes before you. I took note, when I was young, I took note of older Christians in public prayer.

And often I used to hear them use this phrase in their prayer, that the Lord would go before them as the breaker of their way.

[19 : 51] They placed great emphasis on the power of the Most High going before them.

I'm not so sure I hear people use the phrase so much today as I did then. And it seems to me that that generation recognized how they needed the Lord to go before them.

They were placing great emphasis on the power of the Most High. And interestingly, the word breaking is applied to the breaking of a well-built wall.

The kind of fortified wall you might see around a city. And so, the imagery that is set before us when they are seeking the Lord to go before them as the breaker of their way is of a power that sweeps every obstacle before it.

It involves weakening and destroying all people or forces who are striving against you. So, the Lord is depicted as a bold warrior who overthrows his enemies.

[21 : 11] And Moses had already declared this in verse 3. The Lord thy God he will go over before thee he will destroy those nations before thee and thou shalt possess them.

In the New Testament this leader is spoken of has been among the people since therefore the children share in flesh and blood he himself likewise partook of the same.

he is no less than the captain of their salvation who has obtained the victory one who is described as the forerunner of his people and what is true of him did he not disarm the rulers and authorities put them to open shame by triumphing over them and where did he do that?

On the cross. that's the kind of captain of salvation that you have today if you are in Christ Jesus one who is engaged in bringing many sons to glory and the psalmist in reflecting back on how the people of Israel acquired the land of promise he writes it was not by their sword or arm that they possessed the land but by your love and favour shown and by your mighty hand and that is still how believers conquer in the world in every battlefield it is not the ability or resources of the people of God that obtains the victory it is Christ alone who obtains the victory on their behalf and you see it wasn't that Israel had a huge powerful well equipped army but it was the fact that Israel had a great and powerful God that's how they came into their

Canaan inheritance to God belongs all the glory it's true of Israel and it is true of the church to the present hour the victory is all his the psalmist in Psalm 68 looks back and he traces it all to God when you O God went out and led your people through the desert plain and he tells how the enemies were routed as smoke is driven away so you shall drive them away as wax melts before fire so the wicked shall perish before God so here is a nation and they are facing a new challenge a new path which they had not trodden before the Bible tells us you have not passed this way before much was hidden from them the river Jordan was to be crossed and it was in spade the different number of tribes and peoples who occupied the land and you remember the discouraging report that was given by 10 of the 12 spies who were sent out to assess the land earlier on and you remember the report they brought back the people who dwell in the land are strong and the cities are fortified and very large and besides we saw the descendants of Anak there the Amalekites dwell in the land of the

[24 : 35] Negev the Hittites the Jebusites and the Amorites dwell in the hill country and the Canaanites dwell by the sea along the Jordan that is the report that they brought back and that discouraging report because it was believed by many was responsible for the fact that their dead bodies of that particular generation fell in the wilderness well these difficulties were still to be overcome how could they obtain the victory it's possible that the generation being addressed by these words remembered the past and therefore were questioning as to how they might succeed where their ancestors had failed and Moses comes with this most encouraging message the Lord your God himself will go over before you and you know in some ways it was a familiar message they could look back on their journey and what was true of the journey was this not true that the

Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night they may have been unsure of the way ahead and that is true of us all in a sense today we do not know what lies in front of us in this new year what we can be sure of is this that it is all known to the Lord it has been minutely ordained by him so that with this message saying to the people of Israel and to all who trust in the Lord I know what is before you because it has been already ordained you remember that Old Testament sufferer Job could take tremendous comfort from this fact he knows the way that I take and do you remember what Christ himself taught to his disciples when they were together in the upper room he had told them that he was to leave them and they were despondent their hearts were troubled and remember where they found encouragement now we know that you know all things and that my friends is the banner under which the people of God shelter when they are surrounded by thick darkness and facing the unknown now we know that you know all things surely there is comfort there good for us all to have this assurance in the midst of the storms of life when we are tossed this way and that by the huge waves of temptation and trial and tribulation here is a pillow on which to rest your weary head we know that you know he knows the past he knows the present and he also knows the future hidden from us it may be but here is surely a word in season the Lord goes before you the purposeful leadership of the

Lord are we being led by him today are we content to let him lead our lives as we step into another year do we rely upon him the psalmist could say I have said the Lord always before me the purposeful leadership of the Lord secondly the presence of the Lord he will be with you what a precious promise it's the promise that was given initially to the son of promise Isaac remember how the Lord spoke to him sojourn in this land and I will be with you and will bless you I will be with you it was also true of Joseph in Egypt the Lord was with

Joseph remember and as a consequence he found favor with Potiphar his new master the master saw his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands so Joseph found favor in his sight and even when Joseph was unjustly condemned and placed in prison the Bible tells us the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love so that in this particular context not only does the Lord go before them but he is with them no the presence of the Lord is of huge importance it is the presence of the Lord that sets this people aside from other peoples in the world this is what marks them out as a peculiar people that the presence of the

Lord is with them it demonstrates that they are a covenantal people you may remember the importance that Moses attached to the presence of the Lord remember on one occasion this was his plea if your presence will not go with me do not bring me up from here if your presence go not with us do not bring us up from here without the divine presence it would be better for them to remain in the wilderness they would be without the blessing of the Lord and surely this is what the church requires in every generation that the Lord be in their midst for then what is true is this not true she shall not be moved so we sang it in the first psalm here today psalm 46 the church may pass through times when the Lord when there will be dark nights of trial but in the morning will come light if

[31 : 18] God is in the midst God will help her when morning dawns that's the promise of the truth and this is surely the glory of Jerusalem the presence of the Lord it's the very essence of the glory of heaven itself the presence of the Lord heaven could not be heaven without the presence of the Lord and so we read in scripture when Israel forsook the Lord this is what transpired the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house in the prophecy of Ezekiel so it seems to me that the presence of the Lord that this promise is a promise of divine love yes there will inevitably be times when you are aware of the lack of his presence but if you ask me when is his presence with you do you remember the answer that the

Bible gives a most reassuring and a most comforting answer when you pass through the waters what is true I will be with you through the rivers they shall not over while on you when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned the flame will not consume you you could say that this promise is times of trial times of affliction the people of God are not promised exemption from trial in fact the psalmist states that such afflictions are many but the promise of his presence means that there are boundaries limits set to what they have to pass through and by his grace he enables them to pass through the presence of the Lord you can't put value or a price on the presence of the

Lord the purposeful leadership of the Lord the presence of the Lord thirdly the pledge of the Lord he will not fail or he will not leave you or forsake you and this statement is at the very heart of consolation God was here addressing a people who were about to lose their leader and who needed this assurance Moses was about to die and you could say about Moses that he had been the rock of the children of Israel under God he was the father of the nation he carried them like children in his bosom he had been their leader for forty years and now Moses was about to go up to the top of Nebo and to die there and the people were greatly troubled and agitated at the thought and the prospect of losing

Moses and so the Lord gives them this great promise to console them he will not or I will not leave you or forsake you Moses dies like all men must die but you see Moses as God does not die the strong man whose eye was undimmed and his vigour unabated he must look from the mountaintop on the good land beyond the Jordan and then God would take away his soul but God would not be gone he is the dwelling place of his people in all generations but you may be asking what relevance do these words have to you today you may be present this morning and you may have recently experienced the pain that the separation of bereavement inevitably brings about you may feel that you cannot express in words the deep emotional feelings that are caused by such distressing separation but if you trust in

Jesus Christ this is what the Lord states I will not leave you or forsake you I the eternal and unchangeable God will not leave or forsake you despite your failings and shortcomings not even the power of death can detract from this promise you know to use another illustration a couple may pledge to be for one another as long as they shall live and whoever sadly all too often in our world that promise is broken there is separation and divorce with all the heartache and trauma that that inevitably brings about but the bond that is forged between God and his people there is never separation there is never divorce that of course doesn't mean that

[36 : 54] Israel does not fail of course Israel fails but this union between God and his people cannot be broken remember how the prophet Hosea writes of this union God speaking through the prophet I will betroth you to me forever I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice and steadfast love and mercy the one who lives eternally is the one who states I will not leave you or forsake you friends may forsake you it happens but this is an unchanging permanent promise I will not leave you or forsake you a word in season to Israel and also to Joshua and to all who trust in the Lord you remember how God places emphasis on this very pledge in speaking to Joshua after the death of Moses no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life just as

I was with Moses so I will be with you I will not leave you or forsake you you know we may lose the mainstays of our families people in whom we have rightly reposed confidence and whose presence that we may have felt all was well and that is taken from you but the God who is in an indissoluble union with his people will not fail or forsake you you know sometimes congregations suffer the loss of a person that they looked up to a person of God someone who went in and out amongst the people just as

Moses did and at that time you may be asking where does a successor come from perhaps there is a Joshua within sight but you are half afraid as to whether that person will have the power needed to carry on the great work well you have to trust that the God who was with Moses will also be with Joshua just as the people of Israel had to trust in the word of God and the commitment of God I will not fail you nor forsake you you know if you think for a minute what would become of us if God did leave you and forsake you just think of that for a minute how dark your world would be no light to penetrate your darkness nothing to give you hope to cling on to it were better for us than never to have been born you know it's even possible for a friend to say to a friend and genuinely mean it

I will not leave you nor forsake you but that is a promise too far it's impossible to keep for sadly we do not know what we may do or may not do but for those who trust in the Lord they can say with the psalmist we will not fear though the earth gives way though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea the pledge of the Lord the promise of the presence of the Lord the purposeful leadership of the Lord and finally the positive encouragement of the Lord do not fear or be dismayed you know if they were not afraid there would be no need for the exhortation fear not how often do you find this phrase in the

Bible as the Lord addresses the fears of his people down through the life of the Bible this word of encouragement is based on the fact that faithful is the one who has given them the words of encouragement the one who is in a strong covenantal relationship with them you know many may use the same words do not fear everything will be okay but you know most times that kind of encouragement doesn't have any kind of basis or foundation but that is not how a word in Caesar is spoken by the Lord he speaks as the living one who has authority to cast away every source of fear as the omnipotent one he goes before you as the breaker of your ways and yet despite such encouragement you may still be saying oh but

[43 : 02] I am still afraid you know the fear of man brings a snare and the fear of man makes people do strange things doesn't it it made Abraham deny that Sarah was his wife and his son Isaac you might have thought would have learned from the past and he was faced with the same temptation the fear of man made Peter deny his Lord you know at such times the prayer of the psalmist is most appropriate hold up my goings Lord me guide and those thy paths divine and galico memoxua say yeah perhaps you're afraid that you're not a genuine article afraid that you're not bearing the marks of the children of grace afraid that you'll falter on the journey and come short afraid that you'll be rejected when the time of your departure comes well do you remember how the psalmist spoke to his own soul when he was cast down with him hope and God for I shall again praise him my salvation and my

God well with these words of counsel I conclude I trust that this word and season is appropriate for all of us today how else can we face an unknown future how can we go into 2022 without having this Lord going before us without his presence without his precious promise that he will never leave nor forsake without the positive encouragement do not fear or be dismayed let us pray