

# Exodus 23:30

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 14 October 2012

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Exodus, chapter 23, and if we could read again at verse 30.

Exodus, chapter 23, verse 30. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.

Now, as we know, God had entered into a covenant with his people. God entered into a covenant with Abraham when he called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees.

There were special moments, you read about it in Genesis, momentous times when God entered into this covenant with Abraham and promised Abraham that he was going to be the father of so many descendants that it would be more than even the sand and the seashore.

He said to Abraham, I'm going to tell you how many people are going to come from you, to give you an idea of how many people, rather than I'm going to tell you how many. And he asked Abraham to go out and look at the sky and to count the stars.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] And of course, Abraham couldn't. And God said to him, just as you cannot count the number of the stars, because there's just so many, you are going to have so many descendants as well.

And this was at a time when Abraham, of course, had no children. And God had promised that his descendants would be like the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky.

Now, we know that while that is true physically with regard to the Jewish race, it's also true spiritually because Abraham is termed the father of the faithful.

So that the promises that God gave way, way back to Abraham and renewed these promises with Isaac and renewed these promises to Jacob, whose name he changed to Israel, we find ourselves able to lay hold upon these covenant promises because they are for us as well.

All the promises that were given there by covenant, God covenanting with his people, we are able by faith to lay hold upon them, to cling to them, to pray them, to depend upon them, to believe them, because these are covenant promises that have been given to us by the Lord.

[ 2 : 4 0 ] Now, again, as we find the children of Israel, they're moving now in the wilderness. And again, God is dealing by way of covenant. And he is reminding Israel of who they are and that they are his special people.

Out of all the people in the world, he has chosen them to be his people. And it is through them that all the nations of the world are going to be blessed.

And of course, that was fulfilled and is still being fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because it is through the Lord Jesus Christ and through his coming, through his life and through his death and through his resurrection and the subsequent great commission that was given and the spread of the gospel that throughout all the nations of this world, the gospel has been preached and people have been brought into the kingdom. There's great growth going on in many parts of the world just now. And so this was the fulfillment, or this is the ongoing fulfillment of this promise. And we've always got to remember that, that the most important group of people in this whole world, in the eyes of God, are his people. The church. And when we talk about the church, we talk about every person who is united to Jesus Christ by faith and all those who yet will be.

And this, of course, is at the very center of God's purpose and God's plan. Now, we see it, of course, so clearly with Israel in the Old Testament. And God had promised they were his special people and Canaan was to be the special land.

And, of course, all these promises were tied up there. And we've always got to remember that the Lord loves this church and that he's always working for the good of the church. Now, sometimes that might not appear to us to be true.

[ 4 : 47 ] Because I'm sure today, if you're a believer, one of the things that hurts you is where you see nationally, as a nation, we seem to be moving further and further away from God.

And we say to ourselves, where is the church growth that there was of many years back? And while that might be true in many parts of our land, we've got to think and remember that throughout the world, there are millions coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

God is at work always for the good of the church. Our understanding of good, remember, and God's ultimate understanding of good can be quite different.

Because we always measure good as it happens to us at a particular moment. As things are happening in our experience, involving ourselves at a particular given time, and that normally is the present, we say, well, this is good or it's bad.

But God doesn't look at it like that. God looks at a big picture. And always he is working things, ultimately, for the good of his church, and for the good of all the individuals within his church.

[ 6 : 07 ] Now, again, that's why I'm saying today, some of you may find that hard to understand, particularly when you go through things that are difficult and painful and challenging, and things that break you, and all these kind of things.

But remember, God has a plan and a purpose. Like you will find in Jeremiah these words, the Lord is saying the thoughts that I have to you are thoughts of peace.

And not of evil to give you an expected end or to give you a future and a hope. So we've always got to remember that that's the way that God is working.

And we've always got to remember that although we may be surrounded, and Israel were in their journey through the wilderness, they were always being surrounded by enemies. We've always got to remember that the Lord is our leader, that he is the one who is leading us.

Now, one of the things that the Lord was driving home to his people, and they were taking a long time to understand it, and he kept saying to them, look, you are my people.

[ 7 : 18 ] And it's important that you grasp this, because I want my name to be known through the nations by you. I want you to not to in any way involve yourself with other gods.

This was a big, big problem. Because there's something within the heart, within the human heart, that is given to idolatry.

It's natural to us. Something that came in with a fall. And you may say to yourself, oh, that's not true. It is. And you go through the history of God's people in the Old Testament, and it was a great sin over and over and over again.

Even in Egypt, it is obvious that in that short time that Jacob's family moved down to Egypt, between that and their leaving Egypt, that they had fallen into idolatry.

Because there was a time when they were told to get rid of the gods that they had taken from Egypt with them. They were barely out of Egypt. They were hardly into the wilderness on the journey to the Promised Land when they had erected the golden calf and bowed down to worship.

[ 8 : 35 ] So you see that even within people who are separated by God, there is this incredible tendency towards idolatry. And idolatry is setting up anything within our heart that is taking the place of God.

Where we are bringing God down and exalting something else. And it can be very, very subtle. And so we've always got to guard against it.

And the Lord is saying, this was, there's just, you shall make no covenant with them and their gods. And there's just so many warnings against turning to worship their gods.

Verse 24, So you shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces.

And you shall serve the Lord your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and so on. So you see, for Israel, as they marched on, there had to be a ruthlessness in their approach to all these things, to any form or shape of idolatry.

[ 9 : 48 ] And here's a great picture of ourselves as well. Because as we journey on, there has to be a ruthlessness in our life. Because you see, we have enemies, not just around and about us, we know of these, and at least we know of some of them.

But we have an enemy right within ourselves, our own human heart, which is constantly waging war against the principle of divine grace and the seed of God that has been planted in the heart.

That's as God does in regeneration, planting as it were, his own seed within the heart, turning us to himself, and yet still within, there is this that is fighting and resisting.

And so, there were tough times for Israel, and as we know, there are also tough times for ourselves as well.

But the great thing was that, for Israel, that as they moved on, the Lord was going to go before them. Because that's what we read in verse 20, Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

[11:01] And we believe that this is the angel of the covenant, that this is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself, because it tells us there that, for my name is in him.

What a leader. And that is why, as Israel moved on, that, yes, they were aware, they were aware often, of enemies around.

They were aware of the difficult circumstances they often arrived at, when they had no food and no water. And many a time, they started to cry out to Moses for help.

And they felt overwhelmed by the enemies round about them. Have you ever felt like that? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by where you are in this world?

Do you ever feel that and say to yourself, you know, I don't know if I can make it on in this Christian life anymore. I am so struggling. I seem to be just battling against our war.

[12:11] I seem to be in the face of temptation. I am so struggling. In the face of who I am myself, I am so struggling. In my prayer life, I am so struggling.

And sometimes you look around and you think, one day, I am going to be enveloped by all these forces and powers and enemies. Well, do you know something? They are all stronger than you. All these forces and all these powers.

You have a, you are right to fear them. Because they are more powerful than you. But, and here's the but, and this is the but that Israel had to learn as well. greater is he that is within you.

Because the angel of the covenant was going before them. And while the enemy naturally was more powerful than they were, and the nations were more numerous than them.

The Lord again told them that. He told them that they were the smallest nation compared to many of the other nations. And that they were never to take pride in their success.

[13:17] Because he was giving them success. Don't think for one moment that when you are having success, that you have earned that success, or you have achieved that success, you shall.

No. You are a small nation. But it's because I'm with you. It's because I'm in you. Because I am leading you. Because I am helping you. And it's the same for ourselves.

We might feel overwhelmed with all the forces around about us. But if we focus upon Christ, we remember. He is the one who is in us. He's more powerful than any enemy.

He's more powerful than all the enemies put together. And so if you feel overwhelmed today, you look to Christ.

When my heart is overwhelmed, remember the psalmist was saying that, then he would look to the rock. He was going to look to the rock. The rock, of course, that was Christ. That's where his help would come.

[14:14] That's where his safety would come. That's where his security would come. And so the Lord is leading his people. And then he tells them in verse 28, and he says, And I will send hornets before you, which will drive out the Hivites and the Canaanites and the Hittites from before you.

I suppose a hornet is a kind of a bee wasp, kind of stinging insect. insect. Whether, I do not know the actual, and nobody really knows the actual procedure, but what this is indicating is that God was going to go before them.

And as we see, the angel of the covenant was going to go before them. And was going to disrupt and cause havoc amongst the enemy. So that when Israel came to fight the enemy, that they would be able to overcome.

But then, there are many things that we could say regarding this. But the Lord then says to them, Little by little, I will drive out, that's the enemy, from before you, until you have increased and until you possess the land.

And you know, that's the way that God works. By and large, in our lives, we know that there are, there are, always, we'd say that there are, exceptions to the rule.

[15:42] But by and large, it's little by little. Take for instance, your salvation. If you're here today as a Christian, I reckon that for most of you, not for everybody, but I reckon that for most of you, you're coming to faith, at least your understanding of it, your experience of it, has been just this, little by little.

Some of you, it might have been dramatic. Some of you, it may have been so sudden. But the fact is, we're not talking here about the moment of regeneration, which is when, when, when that actually happens, we don't really know.

Because, to the, the actual, our conversion experience is based upon the conversion and regeneration. It's a whole area in there.

But, what we're focusing upon here is that, by and large, most people who grow up in the church, it's little by little. Week by week, month by month, year by year, the word is having its impact upon you, whether you realize it or not.

And for many people, as they've gone through all the different, they've been brought up in home, they've been brought to church, they've gone through the, the, the, the, maybe their creche and mother and toddler and through Sunday school, they've gone through campers and the youth club and youth fellowship and all these things.

[17:18] Maybe there weren't all these things. Maybe there were some of them. little by little, all these things, the impact of people's lives, Christians, other people, people praying for you, people witnessing and putting together and the sermons that you heard and maybe you're saying, oh, I can't think of any sermon but the thing is that bit by bit by bit, the Lord is using all these things and little by little by little and you find that so often and today the likes of the Kabbalah and Christianity explored and so on that people little by little are coming to understand and it's like a slow dawning, gradual dawning until they come to a place where things are beginning to make sense, where the word is becoming alive, where spiritual things are becoming real.

Sometimes people will say, ah, you know, the minister's getting better, it's getting interesting now, it used to, well, just used to fall asleep. No, the thing is that it's the Lord that's speaking, the Lord is working and it's little by little so often and I'm sure that most of you here, as you look back over your life, you will see that there were all these different things coming together until there came this place and point where you became aware that God has worked in your life and then you're saying to yourself, the Lord is my God.

And sometimes it's the same with assurance of faith and let us be quite clear on this, there might be some of the most winsome choices Christians in here today who are severely lacking assurance and faith.

You might be a believer for many a year and you're filled with doubts and uncertainties and you're saying, I don't even know if I'm a Christian or not. But assurance of salvation is not essential to salvation and let us thank the Lord for that.

We can have salvation without being assured of it. We want assurance and I believe that most people have assurance but not everybody has.

[19:43] And sometimes those who have assurance, they will go through a period where they lose that assurance. And that's one of the things that the Bible is so often dealing with is assurance of faith.

One of the great letters, 1 John, deals primarily, John really, if you could sum it up, is saying that you might know.

That you might know. That you might know that you're a Christian. That you might know that you belong to the Lord. And so there is this gradual little by little by little.

And it's the same with regard to our own growth and development in the faith. With our own battles and with our own struggles. It's little by little.

We don't become a full-blown, mature, fully developed Christian overnight. It's little by little by little.

[20:45] Maybe, for instance, you're saying to yourself, and again, you can look at it in so many different ways, sometimes the progress is so small when you're really struggling to defeat all these enemies.

Say, for instance, you might be saying to yourself, you know, maybe yesterday there was a situation and you say to yourself, you know, I made a little progress yesterday.

I was given a piece of juicy gossip, but I didn't pass it on. I was going to begin passing judgment on somebody, but I stopped.

I was going to look at something that wasn't right, but I stopped. My attitude to somebody was bad, but I asked the Lord to help me.

And there's a thousand and one things, but you are aware of it and you say to yourself, I actually dealt with that. That's progress. And the funny thing is, or the sad thing I should maybe say is, that maybe by the end of the day that the very thing that you made progress in, you found yourself

falling in that very thing later on.

[ 22 : 00 ] But you see, the thing is, it's little by little by little. That's the way that Israel were going to inherit the land. That's the way that we're told that they were going to increase and possess the land.

And that is the way that you and I go forward, as it were, inheriting the kingdom. Little by little. Why is it little by little?

Well, one of the things is that through this, the Lord is going to demonstrate his own power. He's going to show us that it's not ultimately of ourselves.

Yes, we are involved in the struggle. But it is him who is working in us. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And again, us little by little to humble us, to discover so that we ourselves may discover what's in our own heart. You know, we constantly get shocks about our own heart.

[ 23 : 13 ] And you know, one of the most dangerous things to do is to really sit in judgment upon somebody and publicly condemn another brother or sister because of what they are or what they've done.

And to go around like that, sort of passing this kind of judgment. Because if the Lord were to leave us to ourselves for a little, there is every likelihood before we leave this world that we might do worse.

And that has happened so often in people's experience. The Lord is saying, right, you think you're more than you are. I'll show you. And I'm going to show you by, it's not that the Lord will ever leave us or forsake us, but sometimes he will leave us a wee bit to ourselves in order to discover for ourselves what we're really like and what a discovery that is.

We discover that we're not nearly as strong or nearly as good or nearly as righteous as we thought we were. And that's humbling. And that's proving to ourselves what we're really like.

And so that is why it is little by little. Can you imagine what we would be like if all of a sudden we were made, if every obstacle and difficulty and trial and temptation and everything was taken away from us, and we were like the full-blown almost finished article, and yet sin was still within us.

[ 24 : 49 ] we would be so arrogant and insufferable, we would be terrible. So the Lord is constantly breaking us, bit by bit by bit.

But he's breaking us downwards in order that we may grow up in himself. And that's the beauty and that's the wonder of it. And he's taking us on till one day we will be in glory.

It's little by little, by little. I don't know, maybe one of the things that we worry about, and I'm sure as people get older, it is one of the things that even the Christian worries about.

How will I be in death? What if I feel deserted? What if my faith fails? And sometimes you can feel like that when maybe we've lost our focus a wee bit.

And we're saying, you know, come the time. What if? Well, I believe that the Lord, as he is with us right throughout life, that he will also be with us through death, into death's dark veil.

[ 26 : 08 ] I do not believe that the Lord is going to leave his people. I believe he's preparing us, and that's what he's doing, he's preparing us all the time for glory. And I am persuaded that he will take all your fears away come that time, because I have seen it happen so often.

Sometimes the Lord will take people like that instantly. Other times he takes them bit by bit. fear.

But the amazing thing is that these fears, which maybe were once there, they subside and they go. Because as the psalm says there about walking through death's dark veil, I will fear none ill. Isn't that wonderful? That's what the psalm is to say.

I will fear none ill. Little by little, until we inherit and possess the land. That's the way we're going.

There is no other way. And thank the Lord that that is. Are you inheriting the land today? We spoke a little while ago about people coming to faith gradually.

[ 27 : 29 ] Where are you today? That's a very important question. And with this we finish. Where are you today? Because maybe for some people in here that they are actually a wee bit perplexed and confused.

Maybe most people in here today are quite persuaded and assured of where they are. But maybe you're not. And you're saying to yourself, you're here and you're saying, I wish, I really wish that I could see Christ.

I want salvation. I really want to be saved. I want to be a Christian. Are you saying that today? In your heart? Well, you know, if you are, I believe that the Lord has put that desire in your heart.

That is not a human desire. That is a desire of grace. Where you are desiring to have Christ. And if that is your desire, keep on seeking.

and ask the Lord to lead you on to that place where you will be persuaded that Jesus Christ is yours.

[ 28 : 43 ] And like Thomas said, you're able to say, my Lord and my God. Bless us. Lord, our God, we pray that we might know that blessing within our own heart.

We pray that we might find the sufficiency of Christ to be more than sufficient for us. We pray that we might go on day by day looking to the head, Jesus Christ.

We pray that we might depend upon him with all our heart. And we ask thee, Lord, that we might discover more and more that through the knocks and the difficulties in life, that we are learning patience and that hope is being built up.

O Lord, grant us the faith and to go on day by day looking and trusting and believing in Jesus. Take us all home, we pray, and bless time of fellowship in the hall after and forgive us our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen.