

Direction

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[0 : 00] almost at either end of the Bible. If you'd like to turn firstly to Deuteronomy chapter 5. So Deuteronomy chapter 5.

I'll read the first seven verses. Now hear God's word. And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.

The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, midst of the fire, while I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord.

For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

[1 : 26] You shall have no other gods before me. If you want to go then to 1 John, which is not the Gospel of John, it's near the back of your Bible before Revelation, and just one verse out of chapter 3.

So this is 1 John 3, chapter verse 2, which says this.

Again, hear God's word. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

That being, of course, Jesus. Well, may God bless the reading of his word, and we'll come back to the message after this next hymn.

[2 : 29] This morning, hopefully, the idea of the faithfulness of God has been embedded in your head and in your heart, that you serve a faithful God, and God's faithfulness towards us is without question.

As we come to these sermons over the next few weeks, especially in the morning, now that I've finished summer Sunday school, we're going to be looking at a relationship with God and how to keep our relationship both close and clean.

And this is really important for the Christian, to keep a close and clean relationship with God. It's what God wants, but of course, knowing what God wants is not the same as knowing how to go about fulfilling what God wants.

You know, there's a distinction to be made. And so in this message this morning, I want us to think very much about the direction that your Christian life is going in, or your life is going in in particular. And one of the things that we have to contend with is that we know that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, but none of us have seen Jesus. We know that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, but no one has actually seen the physical presence of Jesus.

[4 : 01] But we know that none of this doesn't stop us from following him, because what we follow are the words of Jesus. Now, there is a distinction here to be made, which we can get onto in a moment, but it's really important for us to understand that when we follow Jesus today, we follow Jesus in the same way the disciples did, by following his words.

Jesus says, we're going to go over there. And of course, they went over there. Jesus says, get into the boat. And they got into the boat. In other words, Jesus directed his early disciples with words, and he directs us today with his words.

So the physical presence is not there, but his word still is. And that's important. The only thing, difference, I think, with the early disciples to us is that sometimes we can feel that we're following Jesus without the same kind of step-by-step direction that the disciples had.

In other words, when Jesus walked off into a town, the disciples went with him. In other words, they didn't really have to think about the direction. They literally followed the person of Jesus. And of course, that makes things a lot easier. Jesus is the word made flesh who dwelt amongst us. So we must remember that as we focus on the word of God, we are focusing on the person of God in Jesus.

[5 : 32] We are focusing on the one who directs people today in the same way that he directed his disciples of old. But this tension that you may feel of this missing daily direction, okay, is not rooted in the fact that Jesus isn't around for you to walk behind.

Now, Jesus, if Jesus was around and we could walk behind him, our daily direction would be a lot easier, wouldn't it? We simply just follow the leader. The trouble is that Jesus is not around in a physical presence.

And so how are we directed in our Christian life, step by step, day by day, in order to live the way that God wants us to live? Well, the first thing to point out, it's not as difficult as you might think. The will of God is not a difficult thing to discern. It's made difficult by some people, but it's really rather simple. And we haven't got time to go into that today because we're thinking about this issue of commandment and following the direction that God is the Lord our God who led us out and who leads us on.

He led these people out of the land of slavery, but in order to lead them somewhere else. Here's another distinction. That the course of each life is different.

[6 : 57] You look at anybody that you're sat next to. They don't have the same type of life that you have. And you don't have the same type of life that they have, okay? Some of you have difficulties and the person sat next to you may have very little difficulties.

Some of you have real worries, financial worries, other types of worries, health worries. And the person next to you may not have any of those.

And so what you begin to realize is that the course that each life takes is very different. Some people can be healthy for a long time. Some people can have worries that the other person doesn't have.

Some people can have stresses and strains that the person sat next to you doesn't have. But the life that God calls each one of us to live if we belong to Him is exactly the same.

So the idea that my Christian life should not look like your Christian life because the course of my life is different, it's not a good argument.

[7 : 59] You know, I've got different things to deal with and that you have to deal with. That's why our lives are different with Christ. Now, I understand what you're saying, but that's not a good argument.

That's not a good case to make because God knows the course of each life is different and yet the word which goes out to every life is exactly the same.

And that's really important to understand that when God calls us to pray, He's calling the person who has next to no worries to pray as much as He is the person who has plenty to worry about to pray.

In other words, the demands of the command in following God are exactly the same whatever the course of your life. So there are different people in different situations, but the course of your Christian life in terms of what it should look like before God is the same for everyone.

And that's a challenge, I think, to all of us. The question of whether or not we are Christ-like, whether or not we are becoming like Christ. I mean, the whole point of God saving us is to lead us out, to lead us into the image of Christ.

[9 : 12] And we will become like Christ when we see Him as He is. We behold Christ now and we are transformed from one degree of glory to the next.

But when Christ appears, when we see Him as He is, we will become like Him at that moment. And that's true because we become like what we worship.

We become like the very thing that we love the most. And so the idea of your total transformation, well, that will happen, but it will only happen when Christ appears.

You'll only be finally like Christ when Christ finally appears. But until that day, every moment of the day, it's God making you more like His Son.

So here's the principal point then to this. You will become like whatever is your greatest worth. And the reason God gives the commandment to these people here that He's led out of slavery is to sort

of, for them to instantiate in their behavior that God is our greatest worth.

[10:23] That God is the one who should be the biggest love in my life. That God should be the one that I turn to and that I look to and that I focus on before all others.

And that in a New Testament context, that as I behold God in that way, as I behold Jesus in that way, as I worship Him, as you worship Him, you are transformed from one degree of glory to the next.

And so the reason why there is little change in some Christians' lives has nothing to do with learning. Okay, it has a little bit to do with learning.

But it has more to do with the fact of worship and whether or not God is your highest worth. The people who change the least in the Christian community are the people who love God the least. That's a parallel throughout the whole scriptures that you can see that over and over again. The idea of becoming like what we love the most is so basic to the Christian faith that God made it the first commandment.

[11:35] That God gives this to people in order for them to understand that God should be the very gravity that our heart is drawn towards. And you know what?

You can't overcome gravity. Okay, anybody who jumps off a particular height will know that they only ever get pulled in one direction. And in the same way, God is the gravity of the Christian's heart.

That we are constantly being drawn to Him wherever we are. And by being drawn to Him, we are transformed from one degree of glory to the next.

That is so basic to the Christian faith. Here's the next thing, which is fundamental, but again, a principal point. That Christians who believe that the congregation of God's people, that the church, the Christians who believe that the church is a secondary reality in their relationship with God is missing the point entirely.

the idea that I can somehow flourish all by myself, all on my own, without being in a community of God's people is just not true.

[12:45] You take the man in Psalm 1, and I've mentioned this again and again, it's the man who devotes himself to the Lord as an individual, that when you read what type of man he becomes, he is like a tree planted by streams of living water that produces fruit in its season.

And every single one of us here knows that trees don't eat their own fruit. And what that means is, is that the man who is personally devoted to the Lord bears fruit in his life, not for himself, but for the congregation of God's people that he is in.

That is absolutely crucial. And so the idea that I can sort of separate myself from a congregation of God's people, the church, considering it to be secondary, you're missing the point entirely.

It's fundamental to your own growth because we each produce fruit for the others around us. We don't eat our own fruit. We don't benefit by our own fruit.

We produce it for the people around us. And that's why it's crucial that each and every one of us puts God first. Because if we don't, we're basically starving one another because we can't eat what we produce, but we're starving because others around us are not putting God first.

[14:07] So remember, it is crucial for God to be your central worth, not only for your own transformation, but because of the congregation that you find yourself within.

Okay, well, there's the principles. So what does all of this actually lead to in the Christian life? Well, there's a difficulty when it comes to being directed, but it's not the difficulty that you might think.

And here's the difficulty. That most of us here this morning will agree that Jesus is Lord and that he is the Savior. And that's not a problem for anyone.

We sit here, we stand here, we even sing that Jesus is our Lord and our Savior. But here's the difficulty. Here's the difficulty.

What if I said that that's not enough? You say, well, what could be more worthy than Jesus being our Lord and Savior?

[15:10] Well, here's the problem. Most people believe that as long as I focus on Jesus, as long as I admit that Jesus is my Lord and Savior, as long as I keep him as the focal point, then everything in my life will go well.

Then everything in the church will go well. Jesus is the preeminent one. Jesus is the one who is Lord over all. Jesus is the one who is the only Savior.

The trouble is, is that when you focus on Jesus like this, it's a bit like looking at a mountain on the horizon. What's the problem with that?

Well, the problem with looking at a mountain on the horizon is when it comes to direction, not focus.

We can all agree that Jesus is Lord. We can all agree that Jesus is the Savior.

We can all agree that the mountain is on the horizon. But can we agree that we should turn left here or right in order to get to that mountain?

[16:14] Let me give you an illustration. There have been times when I've been driving the car and my wife's been the passenger. It doesn't happen that often, but, you know, she lets me drive occasionally.

And there are other times when she's driving and I'm holding on for dear life. Just humor, marriage humor, marriage humor.

It's perfectly fine. And last week, we had the privilege of being able to go to a friend's wedding. In fact, it was actually Susan's cousin who was getting married.

And we got invited down to the wedding. We both knew where we were going. We both knew the place, the venue that we were meant to be at. We both agreed that we were going to the same wedding.

But what about when we got to that junction? Well, suddenly, it became a little bit more difficult. Should we turn left here or should we turn right? And suddenly, the difficulty was no longer what our focus was.

[17:19] The difficulty was no longer the thing that we both agreed on and that we both wanted to be in the same place at the right time. Rather, the difficulty was down on the ground of whether or not we should turn left here or whether or not we should turn right.

And that's the difficulty that the Christian faces. The issue that we have in the church today and even in this church, if you don't mind me saying, is not that we don't agree that Jesus is Lord, but why are so many of you turning right when you should be turning left?

And why are so many of you turning left when you should actually be turning right? Now, it takes someone to know which is the right direction, not just agreeing together on the final destination.

That's a bit like looking at a mountain in the distance. And we should not treat Jesus that way.

Following Jesus has always been by direction, not just by agreeance on where he is.

the Christian life is not just about the final destination. And yet, so many in the church think that it is. And so many in the church are happy and content to simply sit back and think, my final destination is taken care of.

[18:37] Okay. Okay, I understand. But that's not demonstrating what the Christian life is or what the Christian life is meant to be.

Just look at the life of Moses. A leader appointed by God. Yeah, he had his failures. He had quite a lot of failures just like any of God's leaders does over God's people.

And he had the same trouble with God's people that pastors have today in that who sets the direction? Who is it that determines that it should be left here rather than it being right?

That's a very difficult one, isn't it? Because how does one person go up with a multitude of people?

Well, to put all that aside, God sets the direction. He lays out the commandment of worship because he knows that worship will dictate the direction God's people go in.

And Moses is there to call God's people to worship him in order that the direction, the daily direction, be made a lot easier. And as you know, God's people wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years.

[19:47] That was an issue of direction. But the issue of direction came about because of the failure to worship God properly, to put him first properly.

The thing to notice here is that they were not taking directions from Moses. Moses, okay, was the mediator to God's people. He was the one that God spoke through in order to speak to his people in the same way that God gives pastors, teachers to the church today, that they're the ones who are not setting the direction.

They're spelling it out, hopefully. They are reading God's word and spelling it out that the church should be going left here rather than right and not just drawing your attention to focus on Jesus at a distance.

Okay, that's good, but it's just not good enough when it comes to living the Christian life. The Lord's day, this day, is about direction, not just about looking at Jesus at a distance.

It's about worship of God in order that the direction of his people is the same. Okay, we're all going to have to live a different type of life, but our direction, as in what we say yes to and what we say no to, is the same.

[21 : 08] Why we turn right here rather than left should be the same and this is the difficulty. It's not that we don't all agree that Jesus is Lord. The difficulty comes with why some are turning left when they should be turning right, biblically understood.

That's the difficulty. Let me put it a slightly different way. You as a person, as a Christian, has more in common with someone with someone 500 miles in front of you or 500 miles behind you walking in the same direction than you do have someone who is on the same point of the road walking in the opposite direction.

And yet, too often, the way that we measure commonality is where they are in life. But you have more in common with the person 500 miles ahead of you walking in the same direction than you do have with the person right beside of you heading in the wrong direction.

And that's something that we must be clear on. That the community of God's people is a directed community, not just a circle of friends. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but when two people are walking in the same direction, they can talk and walk at the same time.

Have you ever noticed that? But you get two people walking in opposite directions, can they talk and walk at the same time? No. They're just still. And we go back to Psalm 1.

[22 : 44] The man who gets caught up in the wrong type of company ends up what? Well, he ends up sitting down with them, going nowhere. Again, very basic to the Christian faith and a very biblical idea.

Christians must understand who their common partners are. When God brought us into union with Christ, he separated us from the direction that we were going in.

No longer sin and death, but now grace and life. Christians now no longer just focus on their destination, but now they focus on whether or not they should turn left or right.

The decisions that they make are all about direction. should I do this or should I not do this? The reason why God, through Jesus, taught his disciples to pray the prayer, Lord, lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

Why? Why? Well, very, very simple. I can't spot them. You know, sometimes you can get Christians who think that they're smart enough to be able to figure out where the areas of temptation are.

[23 : 54] Okay, some are obvious. Okay, some are obvious. Certain streets in the city late at night with certain colored lights, okay, obvious. Certain other areas, easy to work it out where it is.

But what about the job that you're applying for? Well, that can't be an area of temptation. How do you know? How do you know? We pray to God to deliver us from evil and to deliver us from temptation, and then we apply for the very job and wonder why we haven't got it.

Well, there may be a very good reason why you haven't got it. It is because God is delivering you from temptation before you even get there. And that's direction. And the reason you're being directed away from it is because you're putting God first.

And God is directing the whole of your life, and suddenly certain people that, you know, who are together don't get married because they're being delivered from temptation.

Okay, certain people who are applying for certain jobs don't get the job because God is delivering them from temptation. But without God, we just go ahead and do those things thinking that they're perfectly okay and fine and that God is, God's letting me do what I want.

[25 : 05] Okay, okay. God, when God lets you do what you want, it's never a good sign. Never a sign of sonship. Never a sign of being a daughter. God disciplines those who he loves.

God gives direction to those who he loves. He's brought these people out of the slavery of Egypt and leading them. So here's the exhortation as we close.

The first commandment is the first commandment because it puts God first. And we ought to remember to put God first. Everyone worships something.

Everyone has a highest love. Everyone has a first love. Everyone has something which they hold on to the most. And whatever that thing is, you're directed by it.

I've met plenty of men who've loved their job so much that they've gone all over the world and yet never with their family. Well, it's the job.

[26 : 04] Okay. I understand it's the job, but sometimes it's not a job. It's a God. And sometimes that activity, the gym, or the Friday nights at the pub down the road, suddenly it's not just a night out

and it's not just exercise.

It's a God. And suddenly because of my attachment to it is so strong, I'm now directed by that. We think we direct these things, but because they become first in our life, we end up being directed by them.

And that's what God is saying here. Worship then is like a compass that finds its true north only in God. God's people are directed by God through worship.

God's people are directed by God not just to focus on Jesus as the preeminent one, the mountain on the horizon, which he is, the preeminent Lord of all and Savior.

But the worship of God helps us to be able to turn left and right when we need to turn left and right and to go straight. Too often God's people go wrong simply, not because they've turned left or right.

[27 : 25] They've gone wrong way before that. It's what caused them to turn left when they should have turned right. And that was down to their failure to put God first. So, final thought.

Remember, remember, the church isn't about coming to an agreement of who God is. It's more than that. It's not about coming to an agreement that we all believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

It is that, but it's so much more than that. It's about him being our greatest worth. It's about him being in first place to everything that we do.

Why? Because only then will we all turn right when we should turn right and turn left when we should turn left. Only then will we all say yes when we should say yes and no when we should say no.

And if we don't agree to the same standard, then what happens is you have a group of people saying yes and no at different times and turning left and right at different times. And suddenly the Christian life becomes incredibly confusing for these young Christians that are growing up in the church because who should they follow?

[28 : 30] Everyone's going in a different direction. So while this is a very basic issue, it's one that can either lead people to God or it can lead them away from God in their fellowship and their devotion.

Remember this. Remember this as we close. Two people can agree whilst in a car lost that they're still going to the same venue.

You can be in a car going in the wrong direction to the venue that you think you're going to and thinking that you're still getting there because you don't know that you're lost. And that's the danger. So direction is absolutely crucial. It's not just about agreeing on where you are going. It's about knowing how to get there.

And direction is set by the worship of God, by God being your highest worth. Amen.