

God's faithfulness to us should lead to our trust in Him

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[0 : 00] Then we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrifying wilderness that you saw on the way to the hill country of the Amorites. As the Lord our God commanded us, and we came to Kadesh Barnea, and I said to you, you have come to the hill country of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. See, the Lord your God has set the land before you. Go up and take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has told you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Then all of you came near me and said, let us send men before us that they may explore the land for us and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come. The thing seemed good to me, and I took twelve men from you, one man from each tribe, and they turned and went up into the hill country and came to the valley of Eshon and spied it out. And they took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us and brought us word again and said, it is good, it is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us. Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. And you murmured in your tents and said, because the Lord hated us, he has brought us out of the land of Egypt to give us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.

Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, the people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of Anakim there. Then I said to you, do not be in dread or afraid of them. The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes. And in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet in spite of his words, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went before you in the way to seek you out, a place to pitch your tents in fire by night and in the cloud by day to show you by what way you should go. And the Lord heard your words and was angered.

And he swore, not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, he shall see it. And to him and to his children, I will give the land on which he has trodden, because his holy followed the Lord.

Even with me, the Lord was angry on your account and said, you shall not go in there. Joshua, the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. And as for your little ones, who you said would become prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea. Then you answered me, we have sinned against the Lord. We ourselves will go up and fight just as the Lord our God commanded us. And every one of you fastened on his weapons of war and thought it easy to go up into the hill country. And the Lord said to me, say to them, do not go up and fight, for I am not in your midst, lest you be defeated before your enemies.

So I spoke to you, and you would not listen, but you rebelled against the command of the Lord and presumptuously went up to the hill country. Then the Amorites, who lived in the hill country, came out against you and chased you, as bees do beat you down to insert as far as Hurmah.

[4 : 15] And you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord did not listen to your voice or give ear to you. So you remained at Kadesh for many days, the days that you remained there. May God bless his word. We'll come back to that after we have sung together this next hymn.

We come then to the second message on Deuteronomy and the second half of chapter one. It may be worth pointing out that it's easy not to follow God. It doesn't take any effort at all.

In fact, it takes very little effort to even refuse God or turn away from his word. It's easy not to follow. The difficulty is to follow. And God does everything that he can, or, you know, God can do anything that he can by definition. But what God does is to encourage his people to walk with him. And God goes before his people, behind his people. And God's people, in their laziness, in their rebellion, in the fact that they do not listen, find it easy to do nothing than to obey God.

In other words, to put it another way, it's difficult to obey God, but that's what God requires. And the fruitfulness of obedience is a fruitfulness that endures, that lasts, that benefits the believer who continues to believe and obey. So as we come into this second part of chapter one, it's easy, perhaps, to be a little bit disorientated as to where we are in the book of Deuteronomy. So the best way to put this is that Moses is speaking historically. It's a bit like watching five minutes of a film, and then the film saying 48 months earlier, and then you watch that bit. Moses is doing this very thing with the people of God. The people that he's speaking of here in this passage is about the people who did not get to enter into the promised land, but he's speaking about that to the people who are about to enter into the promised land, the children of those who didn't enter. So what he's recounting here is 38 years earlier when they had the opportunity to enter into the promised land and didn't through their own rebellion and refusal to listen to the word of God.

And Moses is now speaking to the children of that generation to say, don't make the same mistake your parents did. Okay, don't make the same mistake your parents did. This is why it finishes in verse 46, or a little bit before that, that God tells them to turn and leads them straight into the wilderness, and there they stayed. So what Moses is doing here is before you get to enter into the promised land, here's a history lesson. And the history lesson is important because this is why the people who left Egypt didn't get to enter into the promised land. And Paul tells us we need to be careful how we listen to these Old Testament accounts because we only stand through faith. Don't try and get all smart because you think you belong to Jesus Christ and everything's hunky-dory. You can afford to be disobedient or lazy. None of us can afford to be that way. We only stand through faith, Paul says. And so that's an important issue. God's people have always stood through faith in accordance with his word. So Moses is saying, this is what happened 38 years earlier and learn from it. Okay, 38 years earlier and learn from it. The issue here then is that the lessons of the past are not just lessons of the past, they are the lessons of the present. Corinthians clearly uses Old Testament images and illustrations and the people of God to say, don't make the same mistake they did. In other words, there's no need for the lesson to change. Okay, one plus one equals two. That's about as far as I can go. Okay, that was taught in probably the first ever primary school and hopefully it's still taught in primary schools today. Okay, the lesson doesn't need to change because the lesson is true. It's accurate. And in the same way, God's lessons to us are lessons that don't need to change. What we need to do is to learn the lesson. So we can't, we can't sort of graduate if you want to use it that way because we've got older. You know, I've said to you before that when children get to a certain age in school, they move up a class and they keep moving up a class till they eventually leave school. But I've got a minister friend in Speak, which is down near [9:18] Liverpool, and he ministers in a council estate where 40% of the people are illiterate. They've all left school. So the issue is, is getting older doesn't mean that you get more qualified. Okay, what qualifies you is learning the lessons, not taking the lessons, but learning the lessons. Okay, qualifying in those lessons. In other words, Christians need to be able to share their working out. Okay, it's not enough, it's not enough for the Christian life to simply say, I believe these truths. Why do you believe those truths? Okay, we need to know the foundation that we stand on. We need to be able to show our working out because your faithfulness to God matters, but your faithfulness to God matters to you, not just to God. And that's the blessing here. If only God's people would be faithful, there is blessing and blessing in abundance. But as we have seen from our reading, it's easy to not be. Okay, it's easy to not follow

God. Okay, it's easy to not listen to God. It takes no effort at all. But you have to push someone quite a lot to get them to obey. Okay, it takes a lot of effort to cause God's people to obey him. The issue here then is that God's faithfulness should lead to our faithfulness. Because the only reason we can live in this world is because God is faithful. I want you to think about that. If God wasn't faithful, God couldn't be reliable. Okay, God's faithfulness leads to his reliability. And the fact that we're in relationship with a reliable God is the reason that we have confidence, is the reason why we pray, is the reason why we follow him. Why? Because he's reliable to follow. God is faithful and reliable.

Okay, he's not going to lead us down halfway down the road and go, taking the wrong turn. Let's back up. No, following God means that we may not like the way that he is taking us because we think I'd like to go a different way. But he's reliable. He knows what he's doing. And he knows what his people can cope with. So God's faithfulness is an absolute necessity. Okay, we can't live without it. Can't cope without any of it. We need it. But in turn, our faithfulness to God is also a necessity. Because it's our faithfulness of God that stops us losing out on things that God has for us. Prayer, for instance, many other things.

So the issue here, simply put, is that there must be faithfulness in relationship. Because relationship with God is two-directional. It's not just about him constantly being faithful towards us, but it's about us being faithful towards him back. Not for the case of reciprocation. In other words, God loves me, so I guess I should love him back. God's faithful to me, so that I guess I should be faithful to him back. Now, that's not a relationship. That's tit-for-tat bargaining. In other words, if God's faithfulness to me increases, then my faithfulness to him just might increase. But if I feel that God is being unfair with me, then guess what I'll do? I'll just do what I want. I won't follow. Now, we are like that inherently because we have sin to deal with. So we always pull out the heart lawyers and try and bargain our way with God. We even try and bargain our way with people.

But the faithfulness of God shouldn't lead to bargaining. It should lead to faithfulness back to him because it's necessary. So here's a summary then of where we're at. Moses is recounting failure. [13:09] Israel's failure to enter the promised land 38 years earlier. And he's telling them this, so that they would learn from the first generation. Years and years and years of continual refusal towards God and his word left the generation in the wilderness. And there they died. They could not enter. And then Moses says that even he is disqualified. Now, it's interesting the way Moses puts this in verse 37 because the reason he gives is though Moses understands that he disqualified himself from entering into the promised land by striking the rock in anger in Numbers 20. In verse 37, he argues that the issue is the people of God. In other words, I didn't enter into the promised land because of you. Look at what this has led to. I led you out of Egypt under the command of God, of course. And now you have been my cause for being disqualified from the promised land. He says, verse 37, even with me, the Lord was angry on your account. In other words, you led me, you made me strike the rock in anger. Well, that's tempting to say, isn't it? You made me do it.

Okay. You bring the worst out in me. Well, I can only bring the worst out in you if it's what? In you. Okay. So there may be a pattern here that Moses may just have a point that God's people were able to bring the worst out in him to the point where he strikes the rock in anger. But he's still culpable for his own action. Okay. You can't say, you'd made me do it, so therefore I'm not responsible for doing it. Okay. It's tempting, I know, but you're not allowed to do that. And that's exactly what Moses is doing. Okay. You disqualified me. It wasn't my fault I struck the rock. You made me do it.

Well, maybe, maybe they did make him do it, but God holds him accountable for striking the rock. You cannot blame it on someone else. But that is inherently what sin does. Remember Adam. I think Adam nails it brilliantly, but in the most sinful way possible. When Adam sinned, he didn't just blame God for giving him the woman. As though to say, the woman you gave me caused me to sin. It wasn't as simple as that. He says, effectively, the woman you gave me caused me to sin. So he goes from not just blaming the woman, but to blaming God for giving him the woman in the first place.

In other words, it's not just enough to pass the buck onto his wife. He goes even further in that, saying, the woman you gave me led me to this. The temptation for us to say, I'm not taking responsibility. You made me do it. It wasn't my fault. If you didn't do that, then I wouldn't have done this. If you didn't say this, then I wouldn't have said that. That kind of attitude is a denial of your own responsibility of your own actions, thoughts, words, and deeds towards the other person and towards God. It may be true. It may be true that it's been aggravated. It may be true that the other person rubbed you up the wrong way. But that doesn't disqualify you from being responsible for the things that you say and you do. So Moses disqualified himself also from entering the land. So listen to this. Moses is saying to the children of the generation that followed the children, that followed the parents that left Egypt, they didn't enter. They're disqualified, but so am I.

Don't make the same mistake. Moses is telling the very people that he wants to go into the promised land, that he can't go into the promised land. He is not allowed. God will not allow him to.

[17 : 14] The other lesson we notice here throughout this passage is that failure is an issue that sort of follows God's people, but so does presumption. That not only do God's people refuse to listen to God's word, they fail to listen to God's word. They then are led into presumption, thinking, well, God is always with me. I can do what I want because I'm a believer. I belong to God. Therefore, you know, I can cross the road without looking because I belong to God. He'll look after me.

Well, the way that God looks after you is by telling you to stop, look and listen by crossing the road. Okay? We need to be careful to understand how God looks after us. Okay? We cannot cross the motorway with our eyes closed and say, God will take care of it. Okay? The way God takes care of that is by saying, press the button and wait for the green man. That's how God takes care of us. Okay? But we think, no, it must be more spiritual than that. I must feel it in my heart and I can close my eyes and walk across a busy road. It doesn't work like that. Okay? The way God provides for us is by enabling us to provide for ourselves. It doesn't fall out of thin air. Okay? It doesn't come on trees, as we say to our children. Okay? God provides for us by enabling us to provide for ourselves and each other. So we need to understand how God works. And then finally, in this chapter, and I only have two points to follow this, is the key issue of opportunities lost that can never be regained. You know, we speak of God being a

God of second chances. Well, he may be, or second opportunities. Chance is probably not the appropriate word. The second opportunity. He may be the God of second opportunities, or even third or fourth, but he may not be of the seventh or the eighth or the ninth. In other words, God's people have the opportunity to have something that God promised and then lost that opportunity through unbelief, only to never regain that opportunity ever again. We think, well, God wouldn't do that.

Well, that's exactly what God does. So here's the first point of two. Rebelling against the faithfulness of God. That's essentially what they're doing. Rebelling against the faithfulness of God. They are refusing to enter the land. So what they do, because the refusal is already inherently there, is that they decide to send spies into the land. And we think, well, this seems like a good strategic type of move. It's the type of thing that perhaps, you know, the army would do, or the SES would do, and if they're going to occupy something, send, you know, do a little reconnaissance mission and find out what's happening. But that's not the case here. The reason they send spies into the land has more to do with testing the promise of God than it does about being strategic. What they're trying to find out is, is the land that God is promulgating us as good as he says it is? It's an act of unbelief rather than belief. We'll just send, and we know that's the case, because when the spies come back and say the land is really good, just as God says it was, they still don't go. But they're never going to go in the first place. The spies were a bit like saying, you know, someone invites you, someone invites you around for a meal or your children around for me, and you're sat at the table, and you know you don't like what's put in front of you. They say, oh, just, just taste it. And you go, well, I tasted it at my mum's last week. You didn't. You're just saying that so that you don't have to go ahead and taste it. God's people send in spies not to test out the land, but to test the promise of God.

Okay? Is God telling the truth? Because they bring God's character into question a little further down the page. It was not a strategic maneuver. It was a maneuver of unbelief. And when the report comes back, no, it is exactly the way God says it, you'd expect them to rush in, but they don't. They refuse.

[21 : 20] to go. A good report came back, verse 26, yet, verse 25, yet, verse 26, you would not go up. And so the issue here begins the process of the would not to the could not. In other words, there's a time limit, a time limit even to grace. Okay? There's a time limit to grace. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, that time is up. Men and women, boys and girls, have time to turn to the Lord now.

But when the Lord returns, that time is up. And in the same way, God's people here have the opportunity and time to move into the promised land, but they would not. And because they would not, it would then lead them to the could not. And the could not is there because God would no longer let them.

There would not lead to the could not. Okay? They wouldn't go to the point where they couldn't go because God would not let them enter. And the only exceptions is Caleb and Joshua, two of the spies that came back. And we can read about that in Numbers 13. The next thing, as I've

highlighted, they bring God's character into question, verse 27 and 28. They murmured. They say, you know, because the Lord has hated us, he has brought us out of the land of Egypt to give us into the hand of the Amorites. In other words, what God has actually done is just, he's just taken us out of one environment full of our enemies, the Egyptians, to bring us a little bit further down the road to hand us over to a brand new set of enemies, the Amorites. In other words, he spared us from the Egyptians only for us to be destroyed by the Amorites. In other words, put it a slightly different way, perhaps a more modern phrase, God has taken us out of the frying pan only to throw us into the fire. That's what they think of their God. Their God who did the miracles and the crossing of the Red Sea and all the plagues, the God that has brought them out safely. They turn around and say to him, we've only done it because of this reason. And yet they're standing on safe ground. They need to speak sense. And they're making no sense at all. And that's a problem.

God's people have not been brought out of the fire to be thrown, out of the frying pan to be thrown into the fire. They're standing on ground safe and sound. And yet they would not go in. And the exceptions would be Caleb and Joshua and then their children. And so the children of verse 39 are now the adults that Moses is speaking to. The children that God's saying, no, your children will go in. They know, they neither know good or evil, are now the adults. They've all grown up. And these are now the adults that Moses is speaking to, saying to them, don't make the same mistake your parents did. Don't do it.

So secondly, an opportunity lost. And this has to be seen from the point of view that God's people had the opportunity to enter into the promised land, a land promised to them, and yet they failed to enter through their own refusal, through their own unbelief. It's not that the promise failed, they failed. They failed to believe. Their unbelief made them lose the opportunity to enter into the promised land. And so here's the point. It is not always possible to regain an opportunity given to you by God, which you then lose through your own unbelief. Anything come to mind?

[25 : 07] I think one thing very clearly comes to my mind. It is not always possible to go backwards and do it again. God takes, you could say, our unbelief seriously to the point where he has this opportunity, he has this blessing. And yet if we lose that blessing an opportunity through our own unbelief, it is not possible to regain it with future belief.

Once it's gone, it's gone. Once it's gone, it's gone. And that is a crucial issue for a believing church. Now we can call this, in James' terms, the sin of omission, failing to do the very thing that you should do. In other words, it's there before you. God says, go and take it, and you don't do it. You just leave it out. It's easy to do nothing, right? It's easy not to follow the Lord. But then on top of that comes the sin of presumption, verse 41, that they recognize that they have sinned against the Lord. And so they decide to strap on their bouts with their swords and then enter the land. We'll go up and fight. But then God has to say to them, verse 42, well, I'm not going to be with you.

I was with you when I asked you to go into the land. I would have been with you then, but you didn't go. And now you've got an opportunity to go in through your own motivation, but I'm not going to be with you this time. And so I advise you not to go. And the mistake that God's people make here is the same in both instances. They have refused to listen to the word of the Lord to go into the land, and then they refuse to listen to the word of the Lord to say not go into the land.

Because the moment they do go into the land, they're chased out. They feel the defeat. They fight a battle that they could not win, and they are chased out.

It is tempting to think, isn't it, that if you belong to God, that everything's going to go your way. Why wouldn't you? I can hold God to ransom. I belong to you. If you're a faithful God, then this is going to turn out all right for me. This will look good for me. And so here we have God's people marching into the land on the presumption that because they're God's people, it's all going to be okay. And yet God forward warned them that it would not be okay. And the temptation is to think that we have somehow brought something into this relationship with God. You know, instead of thinking that the reason we are actually the people of God is because God has made us the people of God, not that we have made ourselves the people of God. And there's a big distinction between that.

[28 : 10] A modern day distinction would be someone claiming that they have given their heart to the Lord, which you cannot do, by the way, and God giving his heart to you, which is how you get saved.

And God's people here in many ways think, well, we're just giving ourself to the Lord. We're giving our heart to the Lord. We're strapping on the bouts. We're putting in the swords and off we go.

We're giving ourself. But God says, you can't do it. Why? Because Israel do not win battles because they're strong. Israel do not win battles because they have swords. They win battles because God is with them. Not because they are with God. And that's the mistake they're making. They think we can win because we are with God. But they can only win because God is with them. Only in this instance, he's not. So we don't bring anything to God because God is in need of nothing. Nothing. We're in need of every blessing of God. The blessings in that sense are one directional. They flow from God to us.

us. We can't bring God into a battle with us. God must bring us into his battles because the battle is the Lord. The victory is his. So when all is said and done here, the issue is clear. That they had an opportunity to receive the promised land, to receive this opportunity, but having lost it through unbelief, it was no longer possible for them to regain what they had lost. They would die in the wilderness. I think that's a powerful message for the church. Because it is tempting to think, we didn't get it this time, we'll get it next time. That my unbelief this time won't actually cost me anything. It's not a big deal. But according to God, it's a very big deal. So here's the exhortation. Moses says, remember how, remember why. In other words, please, please, please learn the lessons of the past. You are not smarter. You are not stronger. You are not cleverer. You are not how, perhaps, more technological. You are not capable of having to be able to be able to be able to be able to be learned. The faithfulness of God equals his reliability. It is because God is faithful that we can rely on God. But we mustn't be presumptuous. The only reason we have a stable life is because God is faithful.

[31 : 00] The only reason our life is secure in Christ is because God is trustworthy. It's good to watch God's faithfulness, but the thing that really must be watched is our own. Because we're all prone to the attitude of thinking that I won't make the same mistake as they did. Okay? Or as the teenager says to the parent, yeah, but I'm different. Yeah, but I'm different. It's different for me. Well, guess what?

It's not. It really isn't different for you. Okay? The lessons of the past are the lessons of the present. So we're to be faithful to God, and that's the thing that's in question here. God is faithful to us, and that ought not to be questioned. It is clearly the case all the time. But how are we to be faithful? That's the question we finish with. How are we to be faithful? And the answer is pretty straightforward. In Colossians, we are told that God demonstrates his faithfulness towards us in Christ Jesus by holding all things together. Okay? Christ Jesus holds us all together this very moment. The very chair that you sit on is held together by the Lord Jesus Christ. Okay? Your very body that you walk about in is held together by the Lord Jesus Christ. What you're going through on a daily basis is experiencing the faithfulness and the reliability of God. And your thankfulness for that is to recognize it in the first place. That the only reason I can get from A to B and from C to D, and I can do what I do, is because God is reliable. God is faithful. He holds all things together. And my faithfulness in return is responding to the word that tells me that, in faith and in trust. And so this means, very, very importantly, very, very importantly, that the Christian cannot take the word of God and reorder its priorities in a favorable situation, as though I can somehow design my own Christian life.

You can't do that. You cannot reorder the priorities of the word of God into ones that are personally favorable to you in your lifestyle and then still claim that you're the very image that God wants you to be. You can't be. You can't be. People made here. They presumed that that was the case. They went into the land only to be chased out. Why? Because they reordered the priorities of God. I'll do it my own way. I'll do it my very own way, only to fail. That is a hard lesson to learn. Don't design your believing life. Your believing life is designed for you by the Lord. Like the man in James who prays without faith and then expects God to answer his prayer. And then when God doesn't answer his prayer, he says, see, I told you so. I knew God wouldn't. Well, it was obvious that God wasn't because you didn't pray in faith in the first place. Okay, well, I was suspicious about it. I knew God wouldn't answer.

Well, God said he wouldn't answer to begin with because God cannot be dishonored by your unbelief and still expect at the other end of it fruit. God is not to be dishonored by our unbelief, but honored by our faith in him. So with this, we finish. The faithfulness of God should always lead to our faithfulness in him because it's not always possible to regain the opportunities of God lost through our own unbelief. Amen.

[34 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

O my steadfast love is great He is great through the heavens And my faithfulness, my faithfulness

Through the clouds He exalts him, O God Come out of heaven And my glory be over all the earth

Be he exalts him, O God Come out of heaven And my glory be over all the earth

I will give thanks to thee O Lord of all the people I will sing and pray this to thee Amongst the

nations I said my God is great He is great through the heavens To my faithfulness My faithfulness

through the clouds He exalts him, O God Come out of heaven Let my glory be over all the earth He

exalts him, O God

[37 : 47] Of all the heavens Let my glory Let my glory Let my glory be over all the earth Father

God, we ask this evening That knowing that you are faithful, true and trustworthy That Father, you

would encourage in us faith in return That we may walk our days with you close and clean In a

God-honoring way And this we ask in Jesus' name Amen Amen