

Part 15: The Good News of God With Us

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We are in our final three sermons in the book of Deuteronomy. And this book is a mostly a sermon which began all the way back in chapter one verse six and ends today in chapter 31 verse 8.

In this book we see Moses, the prophet and pastor, pour out his heart by teaching his spiritual children the wonder of God's grace and their response to it. While it includes laws, this sermon is an outpouring of Moses' love for both God and for the people of Israel. And my guess is these people listened to this sermon with bated breath.

John Stott was a long time pastor, theologian and writer in the 20th century, and I recall hearing one man who was able to attend Stott's last sermon before he retired from public ministry. He described this immense weight and reverence for a man who had poured out his life for his church, and for Jesus, who was now delivering his final address.

This is very much how Israel was hearing this message of Deuteronomy. This is Moses final sermon before his death, and they knew that. Moses had told God's people he wasn't going to make it into the Promised Land and today he opens saying, "I'm 120 years old, I'm no longer able to lead you, and the Lord has told me that I will not cross over this Jordan with you."

This sermon is a sermon during a time of transition.

Have you ever experienced the nerves and excitement of a transition like this? Maybe they were good transitions and blessed anxieties, like the anxiety you have as you begin a life together as a newly married couple, get a new job, or head off to college.

Or maybe you know some of the weightier transitions: what does life look like with this new medical diagnosis, after I lost my job, or after the loss of a loved one?

While our transitions might be unique to ourselves, fears and anxieties are often felt universally. And to a people who are facing such a time of transition, Moses' conclusion reminds God's people of one core truth; the truth which Moses as their pastor wants them to know: God will be with you.

I wonder what your response is to a sentiment like that? Do we actually know what to do with it? When you encounter that idea is it just as foreign or as silly as if I said to you, "May the force be with you"? Or maybe you look around at your life and think with a friend as near as this, who needs enemies?

Yet for a people in need of change, a people excited for change, and for a people fearful of change, Moses wants them to know that God is with them.

As Deuteronomy is transitioning from Moses to Joshua, past to future, and from the wilderness to the Promised Land we see three wonderful implications of a God who promises to be with his people: **God with us means that when everything changes, nothing changes, God with us means that he can be with you too and God with us means that even when we are not with him, Jesus brings us back.**

With that said let's read what is the conclusion of Moses' sermon in **Deuteronomy 31:1-8**.

It's here in Moses' wonderful encouragement to his people that we see our first point today: **God with us means that when everything changes, nothing changes.**

Now to really understand the force of what Moses is saying, we need to first understand the relationship this people had to Moses.

It was only forty years ago, when these people were crying in Egypt as slaves, that God called this run-away Hebrew named Moses to lead God's people out of slavery.

It was Moses who was chastised when Pharaoh made their labor harder. But it was Moses who showed the signs and wonders of God and led the people to the Red Sea. It was Moses whom the people cried out to when Pharaoh's army cornered them at the Red Sea, but it was Moses who parted the sea and led them through the water to safety.

It was Moses who met their whining in the desert for water, and bread and meat. It was Moses who at Moab went up on the burning mountain to talk to God when God's people were too scared. It was Moses who pleaded with God for mercy when the Israelites made the golden calf.

It was Moses who encouraged the people to enter into the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea, and it was Moses who led them in the wilderness during their forty years of punishment. And it's Moses who has finally brought them here to the plains of Moab, to once again cross over and enter the Promised Land.

And with a future of difficulties and uncertainty before them, the guy who was always there for them, the guy who did the wonders, the guy who bore with their burdens, the guy who interceded for them is going to die.

And more than that, Moses, the great hero leader is going to die because back in the desert he disobeyed God in his anger and God promised that he would not see the land.

You can imagine that some of these already fearful Israelites are thinking, "Not only are we losing our national hero in this defining moment, but if Moses' sin kept him out of the Land, what hope do I have?"

In a very literal sense everything is changing for the Israelites: new land, new leader, new opportunities, new enemies and new fears.

Have you ever had seasons of life which felt like this? Where in a moment of great decision it feels like everything you once knew has been taken away from you?

But here Moses says in a season just like that, "Nothing is changing?" Why?

Because Moses was only their leader and never their God. Listen to Moses' affirmation to the people: **Deuteronomy 31:3-6**.

Moses says, remember how the land you are standing on once belonged to two powerful kings? The same God that gave you this land is the God who is going to give you that land. Yes, Joshua is going to be

your new leader just like I was. But behind everything you've seen is not the might of a man, but the faithfulness of God.

And that God will not leave you and he will not forsake you. Why? Because this God keeps his covenant to his people even when it seems everything is changing. Your circumstances might be changing, but God's promise to save his people is not.

In one sense doesn't this sound really similar to another farewell address? During another time of transition? After Jesus was resurrected from the dead he stood with a handful of disciples and he told them that everything was about to change, but he reminded them of his promise: **Matthew 28:18-20**.

What Moses is saying to his people is that I am not your savior, so after my death it's going to be ok. And what Jesus is saying to his people is that I am your savior, and now I'm going to continue to be even when things look different.

We all know the rate at which life changes. This means that if you look to the people around you, or the external circumstances of your life, as your primary deliverer you are going to be crushed by what I call the insanity of pace.

How many times do we trust in a location, a home, a job, a relationship, or even our own health only to be crushed when it comes to a season of transition? But then how many more times after that do we think that all we needed was a better home, a higher paying job, or a greater level of health. That's insanity, doing the same thing hoping for a different result.

The pace of life in this broken world will exhaust and crush you because the things of this world are not meant to save you. They are good things and sometimes great things, but they're not God.

When we see God's promise of salvation as our greatest comfort, the comfort that one day everything will be made new and that even in the immediate you have been made new, this is what I call the insanity of grace.

Because it's completely insane that these people in Deuteronomy would hear everything Moses just said and think, "This is fine." Who in their right mind can stare down the death of a loved one or a crisis in health and say, "This hurts a lot, but I'm going to be alright."

Only those who have a confident hope in a grace that makes all things right in Jesus Christ. Jesus saved you, and that same Jesus has no intention of leaving you.

This doesn't mean trials won't come and wounds won't ache, but it means you too can move forward with confidence knowing that God has prepared a place for you. Consider Paul's hope for this in **2 Corinthians 4:7-11**.

Brothers and sisters, the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ means that you can find peace in the insanity of life by resting in the insanity of grace. I pray today that you learn to do that.

It's with this word of encouragement that Moses concludes his sermon. But what follows is more preparation by Moses to encourage his people in this hope. Let's read together: **Deuteronomy 31:9-13**.

So here Moses writes down the whole sermon he just preached and he says to the people that every seven years they are to gather at the Feast of Booths and they are to read the whole of this book out loud. Why? Because people who have received God's grace are given over to always inviting others into God's grace as well.

This is our second point: **God with us means that he can be with you too.**

At the heart of what was to be heard by the men, the women, the children, and the sojourner was the message of grace.

That's really the heart of Moses' message in Deuteronomy isn't it? Moses' sermon started by recounting God's faithfulness in light of Israel's faithfulness. Then the larger middle section outlines the response of obedience that God's people are to have to God's grace. Then finally in Moses' concluding section he reminds them that even when these people break God's covenant, he is going to change their hearts and bring them back into his salvation.

This teaching is the story of God's grace and his desire to save broken people through faith. It began by recounting the physical deliverance from Egypt, but ended looking forward to the spiritual deliverance of a new heart.

And every seventh year, the year where God's people suspended debt payments and loans, the message of God's deliverance and the response of grace was to be read so that those people who entered into the community of Israel, but who had never heard this message might hear it and respond as God would have them: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might."

The pattern of the Israelite community was to celebrate God's grace to deliver them and promote a right response so as to say, "This God has been so near to us, and he can be near to you too."

There is nothing more comforting than moving from the insanity of pace to the insanity of grace, and to those of you in here who have not done that, that offer stands for you as well.

We need to be changed. We feel it in our hearts and in our aspirations. But it's only God's message of grace which changes us where we really need it: in our hearts. And he can change you too. If you're not a believer in here today ask around and take our church as a case study on grace.

There is nothing spectacular about us that we should earn God's grace, but God gave it on the cross and we responded with faith and repentance.

This is the "evangel" the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God, and our whole community rotates around this.

For those who are believers, there are some really practical points in here: **Deuteronomy 31:12-13.**

Evangelism starts in the church. Moses' prescription for sharing this message is that it is shared to those who already belong in the "religious community."

That's because even though people come to church or hang out with Christians, it might be that they have never actually responded to the gospel. This is especially true when we think of our children.

Three times now in his sermon Moses is urging parents to prioritize the preaching of this message to their kids. What does that look like in your home? It doesn't have to be grandiose, and it won't be. But it's so important because belonging to a Christian family is not the same as belonging to God through the gospel. If you don't know what that might look like, talk to someone in your community group this week about that.

One scholar tracked the contributing factors to the decline of several religious communities in American history. He said that the problem manifested itself in three separate generations. The first generation believed the gospel, the second generation assumed the gospel, and the third generation abandoned the gospel.

In our church and in our home we must not make the mistake of assuming the gospel. We must learn to preach this message and implications of grace to our brothers and sisters in our community groups and around the dinner table.

A great way to start this process is to share how the gospel is changing your life with those around you. That's a wonderful and natural place to show others the wonderful and practical change of the gospel. Another way is to simply ask those around you, "How is the gospel influencing your thoughts on this?"

These conversations are often not glamorous, and sometimes we stumble over our answers. But we want to make it clear that belonging to this community culminates in belonging to God through the gospel. Evangelism won't thrive in our city or workplaces if it doesn't thrive here in our church, so let's create habits of inviting people into to wonderful relationship.

And after Moses sets up this evangelistic pattern, God is going to call Moses and Joshua to himself for a final commissioning. And what we are going to see in this third portion is that even though God has promised to be with his people, and even though the message of salvation is to be preached to this people, these people are going to make a mess of things because of their sin.

Where Moses stressed God's relational nearness to his people, God is going to predict how the people will run from that very God. **Deuteronomy 31:14-23.**

Did you hear the contrast between Moses' words and God's words? Moses says to the people, "The Lord himself will go over before, for it is the Lord who goes with you, he will never leave you or forsake you."

But then God describes how these people will respond after Moses dies, "They will forsake me and break my covenant, they will turn to other gods, they will despise me and break my covenant again, and I know that all these things are in their hearts right now even before they cross over the Jordan."

And here we have a problem right? The hope Moses gives for his people is that God will be with them. And yet God says he will withdraw from them. In fact God says he will hide his face from them.

Is that because God isn't faithful? No. It's because our sin distances us from God.

Just this week I had a painful evening and morning with my son. We have a rule where you have to take a bite of dinner or you will have it for the next meal.

It's ok if you don't like it, but it's safe, it's good for you, and you need to trust mom and dad. Owen didn't have it that night, and then he didn't have it that morning. So I packed it for him in his lunch for school.

He took everything I was doing as a sign that I didn't love him. But the truth was I was dying inside. I loved him so much and because of that I needed him to learn to eat foods that won't kill him. And as I was spending time in this text, I realized that this is what our sin does to God.

Sin and the relational distance it provides is not due to a fault in our heavenly Father, but due to our own attempts to selfishly say, "You don't know what's best for me."

And here God tells Moses that his people that he led and gave everything to, are going to run from God and experience discipline for their sin. They are going to throw away everything.

And then there's Joshua. Who is right there hearing all of this, knowing that this is the people, and these are the circumstances are now his problem. Some commissioning right?

But look at the absolutely astonishing message God gives to Joshua: **Deuteronomy 31:23**.

God says to Joshua, in the face of a faithless people, you will bring them into the land. Why? Because God promised it to them, and God has promised to be with Joshua.

Even though God's people were going to distance themselves from God, God was still going to redeem them through a commitment to his promise, and his presence in the heart of Israel's leader.

This is our final point this morning: **God with us means that even when we are not with him, Jesus brings us back.**

Israel's hope in the midst of their sin was that God would be with their leader and that leader would bring them into the Land of Promise.

Joshua's commissioning in the face of Israel's sin is meant to point us to the work Jesus would do to ultimately redeem his people. Israel's history showed that while God's anointed leaders did good things in bringing them back to God, they never were able to keep them there.

But look at how the angel introduced Jesus in the book of Matthew: **Matthew 1:21-23**.

Jesus would finally be "God with us" in a permanent and abiding way. He would solve our greatest problem of separation. This has two wonderful points of application for us today.

The first is that it's only Jesus who stand between Moses' promise of God's nearness and God's promise of judgment.

I'm sure that there are both people in here who feel like their sin has distanced themselves from God in such a way where only their effort can bring them back. And that's a burdensome place to be. But if that's you, look at what Jesus has done for you. He brings you all the way back because he never disobeyed and he took the punishment for your disobedience.

If Jesus is in your life, God is right there too. The relational warmth of no-condemnation through Jesus Christ is right there if only you would turn back to God! Because Jesus is God with us, there is a way back to the promise of God's faithfulness even when we have strayed away.

This was the prayer of Jesus himself. Do you realize that if you are hearing this message for the first time, Jesus prayed for you? And he prayed for the effect of salvation to bring you near to God. Listen to Jesus' prayer: **John 17:20-21**.

Jesus brings us all the way back to God even when we are far from him. This is how you move from the insanity of pace to the insanity of grace.

But there is a secondary point when it comes to discipleship. Just as Joshua was promised God's nearness in leading God's people into the Promised Land, the church has been promised God's nearness in the task of making disciples in this land.

That's what we saw in the Great Commission. Why does Jesus promise himself? Why does Jesus give to the church the Holy Spirit? Because the task of making disciples is going to be hard and difficult. But by God's grace we really can do it.

God says to Joshua, my people are messy people, but because God is with you, you can care for those who are broken. As we fight to respond to God's grace by pursuing holiness and helping others do the same, we are going to encounter people, and sometimes it might even be you, who run from God.

And in those moments I want you to hear that God has given you exactly what you need to care for those people. God is with you in the gospel that saved you.

It is in the context of discipleship and fighting sin that the author of Hebrews picks upon Moses' words in Deuteronomy: **Hebrews 13:5-6**. We need this encouragement to be a healthy church.

Now it's true that God gives this promise in Deuteronomy to Joshua, the leader. And it's true that the elders of this church have a particular responsibility to lovingly care for those who are in sin, but we have nothing more to offer than what you do!

You've probably heard me share this story before, but it's fitting here. The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, was once held up and late for a sermon. So his grandfather got up and started preaching.

When Spurgeon finally arrived, his grandfather stopped, and said, "At least here is my grandson! He might be able to preach the gospel better than me, but he cannot preach a better gospel!"

What a wonderful truth and testimony to the hope we have in discipleship. Life as God's church is going to be messy, but when God is with a people group through Jesus, there is always a way forward even when life is hard.

So let us as a church be strong and courageous, let us not be in dread of the challenges in our city and in our church, for it is God who goes before us and he will never leave us or forsake us.