

A Picture of the Depravity of man – Driven By Fear

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Deuteronomy Series

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Bible Text: Deuteronomy 1:19-46

Preached on: Sunday, November 9, 2008

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Let's pray.

Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth and how we desire your excellencies among us this morning, that you would open up our eyes to see wondrous things from your law, that you would convict us of our sins, that you would put our feet upon a rock and a new song in our heart. Oh Lord, protect us all from anything that would be wrong thinking this morning and that you would help us to discern your will by what you have said here in this beautiful passage of Scripture that... it both comforts us and it terrifies us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So we do have a very comforting yet terrifying passage of Scripture before us. We have a description of a weed that is the soul of ever man and every woman. And that weed would grow and overcome you and steal all the blessings. It would choke out everything that is good. And here Moses identifies this weed that grows up in the hearts of all of God's people.

But what will they do when they see that weed? Because everyone will see it. But what will you do once you see that emergence of this little weed that we see here?

Our text today begins with a command that is issued in Kadesh Barnea to enter the land. And it continues by illustrating what the children of Israel did in response to that command. And it shows us the weed that stole the blessing that God had for them. And then it ends with weeping in Kadesh Barnea. It begins with a command and it ends with tears because the weed overcame the hearts of the children of Israel.

This text here before us, it contrasts the goodness of God on the one hand and the sinfulness of man on the other. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."¹

But the goodness and the holiness of God is here as well. God says, "Look up. Do not be afraid."

But man in his sinfulness will not believe.

¹ Romans 3:23

Verse 32 is a key verse. “You did not believe the LORD your God.”²

The story that is here before us is also told in Numbers chapter 13 and it begins with a survey of the land and then it ends with weeping.

Now this weed that is identified here is something that I trust that God would help us to see if it is growing up in any one of our hearts. I am confident that his weed is here among us and I pray that God would help us to identify it, all of us. No one is exempt from this weed that we see here growing up.

You know, I just returned from really a glorious trip to New England. And when we went to conduct a conference there for church leaders and when we arrived our hosts took us straight to the grave of George Whitefield a site of the Great Awakening. He took us to the place where George Whitefield died. And we ended up spending quite a bit of time visiting the sites of the Great Awakening and it was exciting because it caused my heart to burn for an awakening in our own day. And how does an awakening take place? It happens when people see and then kill the weed that has grown up in their hearts. And I pray that God would give us a mighty great awakening.

There we were at the grave of George Whitefield. It was an absolutely amazing place. His grave is right under his pulpit, down under ground, in this sepulchre and in the sepulchre on top of this grave is a cast of his Bible. And on top of this Bible is a cast of his skill with these bright lights shining on it. It was absolutely stunning to be there and to think about the brevity of life. Yet if... if there would be a candle lit in a generation that it would burn and it would say, it would bless, it would cause many great things to happen.

Whitefield said, “God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.” I pray that God would give us that same spirit. That we wouldn’t go a quarter of an hour with an individual without appealing to their soul regarding the condition of it and whether this weed has also overtaken them and if it might be uprooted and that blessing might flow as a result of uprooting it.

We also went to the grave of David Brainerd and we were amazed to just consider the biography of David Brainerd that we have been reading this year. And there he was lying in his grave.

David Brainerd converted at 20 or 21 and he dies at age 27 and ends up with a biography that launched a thousand missionary ships. A short life, a conversion close to the time of his death and yet an incredibly fruitful life. Why? Because he saw the weed and he repented of his sins and said, “Oh, Lord, I pray that I would not be disobedient.” He said, “Oh, that I may not loiter in my heavenly journey.”

One of the great lessons of the life of David Brainerd for us is this, that we would be so sensitive to sin, that we would be far more sensitive to our disconnection with God.

² Deuteronomy 1:32

You read his biography and he is just up and down, up and down. It gets laborious after a while. You think, "Is this ever going to end? Is he ever going to be on, you know, on a sailing ship, you know, headed, you know, with a good wind?" No. He is up and down. He is just like you and I.

But he was more sensitive to his sins than we are. He was more sensitive to his disconnection with God and so he cried out to God. He is a great example for us. We shouldn't despise his ups and downs, but we should say, "Oh, Lord, help me to have that same spirit that says if I am down, Lord, show me, bring me back. Pull the weed and let the blessing flow again."

That was what David Brainerd desired.

We also stood at the graves of the children of Jonathan Edwards. These children, 10 daughters and one son. All the daughters are six feet tall. They said he had 60 feet of daughters.

I have a friend in San Antonio who has lots of daughters and I like to send him, "Yeah, but how many feet have you got now? How many feet of daughters do you got?"

And Edwards had 10 daughters, 10 glorious daughters and one son. And these daughters and this son went out and they glorified God and the ripple effect for generations was absolutely enormous.

In 1900 someone conducted study of 1400 of Jonathan Edwards' descendants and they found that there wasn't a single industry that wasn't effected by this family, that there wasn't a single educational institution or theological seminary or a missionary society that didn't have platoons of the Edwards descendants in them because Edwards' home was a little house of God. It was a place where the glory of God was proclaimed every day. It was a place where they had a father who was the head of his household and he desired the sweetness of the kingdom of Jesus Christ to prevail there.

Jonathan Edwards, even though he is maligned because he preached a sermon called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which really was perhaps one of the most blessed sermons because it shows us how to get rid of the weed, but Jonathan Edwards was the apostle of love. He was constantly... the word that he uses more than anything, sweetness. Why? Because he saw the Lord Jesus Christ as the very best, as the most beneficial, as the most wonderful present in a home. And so there we were, you know, at these graves.

Very interesting side tidbit here. All of the Edwards children in this graveyard in Northampton, Massachusetts are buried in this one section and then, except one daughter, Jerusha, is buried right next to David Brainerd. Isn't that interesting? Jerusha nursed David Brainerd in the last three or four months before he died in the Edwards home and then she not too long afterwards died of the same disease and many say that this was a

love that they had, but yet it was cut off. But there they are. All the Edwards children over here and about 100 yards down is David Brainerd and Jerusha there laying in their graves. It was an absolutely stunning time.

But I pray for a Great Awakening. I pray that God would give it to us. And I know that this text shows us the key to a Great Awakening and the key to the appeals that we must make to ourselves, our children and all those that we relate with out in our businesses and out in our neighborhoods and out in our communities that God has placed us in. And we should be out there, absolutely, as these great figures of the Great Awakening were.

Deuteronomy 1:19-34 brings us a story of a fearful people and a faithful God. These people are just like you and I. They fear obedience. They delay obedience. They actually have rebellion, but they call it something else. They have unbelief and they have false repentance and they also have bitter tears for the disobedience that was part of their lives when they rebelled against God. And here what we find are two, I think, really critical things for us as a church.

What we find here will help us understand ourselves and what we must do.

Secondly, not only does it tell us the story of our own lives, but it also tells us the story that we must tell as well in evangelism as we explain the gospel.

Now remember the organization of Deuteronomy. Let me just remind you where we are in this book here. We are in chapter one, the second half of that chapter. Deuteronomy is composed of three sermons, three speeches that Moses gives. The first speech goes from chapter one to the end of chapter four, not quite to the end of chapter four. I believe it is verse 44. And then the second speech goes from I think 4:44 up to chapter 28. And then the last speech goes to the end of the book. And so now where are we? We are in the first speech that Moses gives to the children of Israel and he is giving this speech probably around 1405 BC. The Exodus was at 1445 and 40 years later this speech is being given here to children of Israel.

And it is designed to remind the children of Israel of the gospel. It is there to remind the children of Israel of sin and what it looks like and how to detect it in your own soul. He tells them the story of their lives. And it is the story of your life and mine. We will be told here through this passage of Scripture what sin looks like.

You who have little children here pay attention because this passage will help you coach your children for detecting sin that is in their souls. And in doing so it will also perhaps convict each one of us as well.

So now we are in this first speech in the first four chapters and let me just give you a sense of the structure of this speech. We will spend more time on this, perhaps, next week or the following. But in the first three chapters we find the greatness of the gospel and in the last chapter, in chapter four there is a call to obedience and this first speech really is an illustration of how God uses the gospel to motivate his people to obey the law and he

does this in order that they requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. And it is fulfilled in obedience. But that obedience is finally secured by the obedience of Jesus Christ. It is his obedience that saves us. It is his substitutionary death that saves us. Yes, we must have a heart to obey, but we never can obey enough. Yet we should continue to press for obedience that we would be... that we would heed the appeal of God as he says in chapter five verse 29. “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!”³

The appeal is for obedience and yet we always have to see this principle of obedience in light of the cross of Jesus Christ. We press for it with all of our hearts. We desire to obey all of the commandments that he has given to us and yet always are aware of the cross, of the blood of Christ, that cleanses from all of our shortfalls and our keepings of the law because we will always fall short. If we break one law we have broken them all. We are hopeless in our sins without the blood of Jesus Christ.

At the same time we are called to a passionate obedience. So that is what you see here in the first four chapters of Deuteronomy. You see the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And last week we saw the first half of this chapter which was an explanation of the bountiful gifts of the goodness of God, how he gives his children a land, how he gives them a vision for the future and he provides them many blessings and he threatens them that if they disobey they blessings will eclipse and they will disappear.

And so that’s where we are here. We are in the first speech of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, the first of three speeches.

Ok, so let’s begin to dive into this text and move through it. The first thing that we see here is the faithfulness of God.

You have an outline in front of you that will help you understand where we are going here this morning. There is a revelation of the blessing of the faithful God in verses 19 through 25. And here we notice that a good land is promised. And he says:

So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the LORD our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.’⁴

Here are many clues regarding the goodness of God. This is the Lord our God. I am his and he is mine and he has a good land for me and he is calling me. He is urging me to

³ Deuteronomy 5:29

⁴ Deuteronomy 1:19-21

choose the choicest of foods. He is urging me to drink the best water and the sweetest wine. He desires my soul to be fat. And he knows that if I partake, if I look, if I think, if I negotiate with sin that I will find all of these things harmed and tarnished and destroyed in me.

So here we see the faithfulness of God. All of God's commands are for the blessing of his people. There is only pleasure in one place, true pleasure and that is in God. People try to look for love in all the wrong places, but there is only one single place in the universe where there is true pleasure. Yes, there are facsimiles of it. Yes, there are caricatures of it. But there is only one true joy and it is always found in obedience to God. You can always find yourself under the umbrella of his blessing when you see his nature, his holiness and desire with all of your heart.

And so there is this good land that is promised. But there is an acknowledgement here. Did you notice it? There are obstacles along the way. It was a terrible wilderness here. It was a great and terrible wilderness.

God often leads his people through terrible wildernesses in the midst of his blessing them. Yes, he does send his children through trials and tribulations. At the same time he does not cut off his blessing. And those desert lands can be gardens of the soul. Those places of pressure and difficulty God turns into the sweetest times in your life.

That is what God does with deserts. If you are in a desert, your only hope is to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and he will make the desert a spring.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.⁵

There is a picture of a person who is going through the valley of the shadow of death, but yet it is a garden. It is a beautiful place. That is what God does for his children.

And so this faithfulness of God in the midst of a terrible wilderness is revealed here. You know, when I read this I think of Psalm 118 verse six. "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"⁶

I think of Isaiah 35 verse four. "Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you."⁷

⁵ Psalm 23:4-6

⁶ Psalm 118:6

⁷ Isaiah 35:4

God is the God of the wilderness and he pours out his blessing there. So we see a picture, here, of a faithful God.

Let me just show you a number of places in this text where it is revealed. Look at verse 21. “Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you.”⁸ That is provision of God.

And then later in the verse a promise. “Go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you.”⁹ He is a God of promises. He keeps all of his promises.

He is a God of goodness, verse 25. “This is a good land which the Lord your God is giving you.”¹⁰

Verse 29. He gives encouragement. “Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.’”¹¹

God always fills the hearts of his children with songs of deliverance. I love that song that we sang today. You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance whenever I am afraid. You can always know who is speaking to you. Just check the meditation of your heart. As you give a song of deliverance in your heart, if not it is probably the devil that is speaking to you and you are bowing to his ridiculous depressing will.

But yet God is different than that. He is full of encouragement. He goes before you.

Verse 30. “The LORD your God, who goes before you.”¹²

The God of protection, verse 29. He will fight for you. He is the God of carrying his people. He says, “In the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son.”¹³

Here is a picture of the loving kindness of God carrying his people through all of their trials and tribulations. What are your trials and tribulations? Do you feel the arms of God this morning? Feel those arms. Feel them. They are around you. They are gripping you. He will not leave you nor forsake you. He will not let you go. He will not let one of his children out of his hands. He is carrying you as a child. Right now this very moment in the midst of your questions and your fears of the future and your trials. He is holding you. Do you feel his arms? Feel his arms this morning. Notice it. He is there. He does love his people.

Here in this section of Deuteronomy we see the sharp contrast of the rebellion, the weed and yet the God who carries his people and loves them with an everlasting love.

⁸ Deuteronomy 1:21

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Deuteronomy 1:25

¹¹ Deuteronomy 1:29

¹² Deuteronomy 1:30

¹³ Deuteronomy 1:31

In verse 33 we see that he leads his people that they pitch their tents and he showed them the way in which they should go through pillar of fire and a cloud by day.¹⁴

And he said to them, “Do not fear or be discouraged. Do not be terrified or afraid. The Lord your God goes before you. He will fight for you according to what he did for you in Egypt before your eyes. He will carry you.”

So in these first verses we see this picture of the faithfulness and the goodness of God. And in the midst of it is sort of an illustration, a scouting mission that took place.

Those of you who would love to go on a scouting mission like this I could just picture every little boy wanting to go with those 12 men who went into the Promised Land to scout it out. What little boy is there that doesn't want scout something out. I remember when I was a little boy I disappeared for hours. My parents had no idea where I was. And then they found out that there were other children in the neighborhood that had disappeared. I believe I was about seven or eight years old. And someone got in a car and found me on a busy street going a direction and I had a staff in my hand these children of the neighborhood and we were going on a scouting mission. We were going out and it terrified our parents, but, boy, was it great for us. We loved it.

I will never forget walking out of the neighborhood. We were free. It was the land. We were going there. Every little boy wants that.

Well, imagine this scouting trip that was taking place here. Oh, wouldn't you have loved to have been there? They crossed the Jordan River. They go into this land of milk and honey. They are picking these figs and grapes, eating them, bringing them back and looking at giants. Wow. Wouldn't that have been amazing? Oh, that we had some faithful little boys on this scouting journey that would have said, “No, we will follow the Lord. Those giants are nothing.”

Often it takes the faith of a child to see what God is doing in something. And I pray that God would give our children great faith, that their prayers, their faith, their love their joy would lead us, would inspire us. Their energy, their labors would be such a help to all of us. Yes, it is true. The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Well, so here is this scouting mission. The 12 men representing the 12 tribes of Israel going in to the Promised Land and this scouting mission engages and they come back and the message is mixed.

Ten spies were faithless unbelievers and two were not. And they came back and they discouraged the people.

¹⁴ See Deuteronomy 1:33

By the way, let's just say this for a moment. The majority is not always right, ok? Do you understand that? Do you understand that, men? The majority is not always right. Sometimes it is 10 to two.

Little girl, young man, the majority is not always right.

Here it was 10 to two, 20% saw it. And then they discouraged all the rest of the people and they would not go into the Promised Land and the people even though God had commanded them to go in, they would not go in.

Sometimes the people around us are clueless as to the will of God. We must be careful that we are obedient.

So the first scene here is a description of the faithfulness of God, the beautiful call of God for the opportunities that are ahead. And then wham there is the depravity of man slapping us in the face again, telling us the story of our own lives as well, exposing our own fearfulness and things like that.

And what we have here are a number of things that I would just like to detail and sort of identify for us. There are five issues here that always go with this depravity, this weed, this fear that we have. And there are five ways that it is explained.

Here is what we will learn here in these five things. We will learn something about what sinfulness looks like. We will learn what unbelief really looks like in real life. We will be shown our own sin. I pray that this won't be a time for us to be high minded and think, "Oh, the stupid children of Israel. How come they couldn't get it?" but that we would say, "No, I am one of the children of Israel. I am one of those 10 spies. Help me, Lord. Help me, Lord, to humble myself under your mighty hand and understand how I might obey you."

And so what we find here are these five things. The first of the five is an example of reasoned rebellion, an example of reasoned rebellion. Now these are careful people. These are urbane, smart people who are thinking life through. They are considering the assets and the liabilities that are before them. They are considering how they might be successful in their lives. And here we find, first of all that they would not go up, but they "rebelled against the command of the Lord,"¹⁵ verse 26. Do you see that?

Verses 26 to 28 is where we find this.

And nd you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people are greater and taller than we;

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 1:26

[that's one] the cities are great and fortified up to heaven [that's two]; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim.¹⁶

This is a reasoned rebellion. They are coming up with reasonable thoughts about why they cannot obey God. That is what is happening.

All of our rebellion is reasoned, I think. Now perhaps you may think that there are some instances in which our rebellion is not reasoned. But I would just like to present to you that our rebellion is reasoned most of the time, that we are making choices. And we are making choices that we think that serve us best. The problem is we don't really understand what serves us best. And so in our reasoning we are darkened. We don't really understand what really is good. We don't know our right hands from our left. And because of that we reason wrongly. We make projections about what might be if we obey. And miss it, we miss the premise and then we miss the conclusion as a result.

And so there is this reasoned rebellion that we see in our own lives.

Notice here that they were complaining in their tents. Now what was going on here? What were they complaining about? They were actually in their tents they were slandering God. They were saying that God was not good. That's the root of all sin is forgetting that God is good, that is will is wonderful. And they are slandering... they are saying, "This is God... God is not..." This is not a blessed way to go.

The slander of God, by the way, is nothing new. It is very old. It started in the Garden of Eden when the serpent slandered God and said, "God is not good. You need more. You need more than what God would provide for you. Go get it. Go get it. It's a free country. It is a free world. You will be wiser. You need to know what is going on out there, Eve."

And so the devil was slandering God saying, "Yes, you need more than God. You need something else. Go get it."

That is the beginning of our rebellion. But it is a reasoned rebellion. It carefully weighs what is good for me. But it always misses. It always misses what is truly good and that is the problem with this weed that grows up. It crops up and it looks like many weeds do at the beginning. It looks so compelling. There are some beautiful weeds out there, at least at the beginning. It looks like life, but it is not life at all. It will choke you and it will take away the bumper crop that God desires to bring about.

So they are complaining in their tents.

Now, let's analyze the dialog in this tent here. There is so much we can say about this dialog that was going on in the tent, this reasoned rebellion that was taking place.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 1:27-28

But they are misunderstanding history. They are misrepresenting God. They are misrepresenting what has gone on in their own lives. And they are saying, “The Lord hates us. The Lord wants to destroy us.” And they come up with all these reasons.

Now we always find reasonable excuses to rebel. Rebellion always must seem reasonable to us. It must always have a story. And we tell ourselves the wrong stories all the time. And that is what these people did.

Now here was how they reasoned their way through it. First of all, they were blame shifting. They said, “Our brethren came back and discouraged us, ok? Why are we doing this? Why are we not obeying? Because our brethren have discouraged us. They have told us that things are bad out there. A reasonable person would heed that warning, don’t you think? If the majority said that something was bad, wouldn’t you hold back? If the majority was telling you to go in a certain way wouldn’t it seem reasonable to you? You don’t want to be so odd. You don’t want to stand out too much, do you?”

That is exactly the pressure that we constantly have upon us in these pagan nations that we live in. The world is in the hands of the devil. It lies in the heart of the evil one. And if we follow it that is where we will go and that is what the great mass of society wants to do .

Is it the same as in the 80 20 proposition, typically? I don’t know. Calvin thought it was 99 to 1%. That’s what he thought. I don’t know what it is, but here is what I do know. In this case you had a persuasive majority who wanted to go in a direction and the sheep followed.

Don’t be sheep like that. We cannot be sheep like that in this generation. If you want an awakening to happen then you cannot be like the children of Israel who say, “Well, everyone else is discouraging us from this, then we should run back and not obey God.”

Awakenings are held back by the simple obedience of God’s people, their faith in him, their trust that his ways are pleasant ways, that all his paths are peace. If you expect—and I do expect and pray for a great awakening—then we must appeal to one another not to listen to our brethren who are speaking against the Word of God.

And here they our brethren discouraged our hearts. That was one reason. And then the other reason was the people. There were a lot of people in the land and they are well armed, ok?

A reasonable person would say, “Oh, no. We don’t want to mess with these people.”

And the cities, the cities are huge. They go up to heaven. They are terrifying in their strength and in their scale. How could us, a little people, take on this gigantic city? Well, God told them to in and take it.

And then there was the Anakim, the giants of the land. These were all reasonable reasons to disobey, right? Wouldn't a reasonable person would say, "This is really not the right time to go in. I think maybe we should wait and, you know, build our forces and do things our own way."

So the first element of our depravity is an example of a reasoned rebellion.

So here is the question. We all have this ability to reason our way out of obedience to God. Oh, that God would help us to discern when our hearts are doing that, that we are trying to make our own way, we are trying to make our own life, to choose something better than God and what he has provided. This is always a danger. It always ends in weeping. It always ends in gnashing of teeth. We need to understand that. We might have all the reasonable reasons in the world and we might have all the other people in the world going in the wrong direction, but we need to know where it all ends. It ends in Kadesh Barnea weeping in sorrow for all of the losses.

So that is the first illustration of our depravity.

Here is a second. Here is a demonstration of heart felt unbelief. We always talk about heart felt belief, believing in your heart. Well, there is also heart felt unbelief and this is illustrated in verses 29 to 33.

Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe.'¹⁷

That is the key right there. "Yet, for all that, you did not believe."¹⁸

Can we all say that? "Yet, for all that, God has done."

Think of what God has done. God has been feeding you every day of your life. God has surrounded all of us with a thousand blessings. Think of just the colors and the textures and all the things that God exposes you to in his nature and in his beauty.

It is a beautiful day today. It is stunningly beautiful. God lays out his grace and his blessing upon us. He feeds us. He gives us water to drink. He gives us relationships. He puts us in families. He puts us in churches. He has cared for us. He has saved us from our sins. He gives us hearts to repent.

God is a blessing. And yet we learn here that even through there were the great blessings of the manna and the quail in the wilderness, the water from the rock, the pillar of fire in

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 1:29-32

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 1:32

the cloud, that there was God's care all these years. Forty years in the wilderness, even so. What happened? They did not believe the Lord, verse 32. "You did not believe the LORD."¹⁹

So Moses is appealing with the people on the issue of the heart. And he is recognizing their terror, their fear. And he is telling them that the issue is unbelief in the heart and he is appealing to them in many ways. He is reminding them of God's goodness. He is begging them to remember the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living and in the land of this terrible wilderness that he took them through. This is what God does. He is constantly trying to woo us back.

There is the weed. Pull it out. Don't have this unbelieving heart. Don't fear. Don't disobey because you fear a consequence.

You know, set in this text here is one of the precious verses for our family, by the way, and it began to be precious many, many years ago when my Father was headed to Iwo Jima in World War II. And his father came down to meet him before he would depart for the Pacific to go engage in that battle and my grandfather came down to see my father and he spoke to him and he gave him a little Bible that I still have today and he gave him a Bible and he said, "Son, the Lord goes before you. The Lord goes before you." That is the word of Jesus Christ for all of his children. I love that verse and it is right here in verse 30.

"The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you."²⁰ And that verse rings true to me and I love that verse and I believe it. And yet there are times when I reason, I reason with the reasons of the world and I lose the blessing that is there for me.

But here in the midst of this heart felt unbelief we find the kindness of God as he appeals to us.

And Moses says, "The Lord will go before you. He will fight for you."²¹ I love that phrase, "The Lord will fight for you."²² This phrase pops up a number of times in Scripture.

Moses used it with the children of Israel when they were standing at the edge of the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was pounding down upon them and they had nowhere to go. And Moses stood and he said, "The Lord will fight for you."²³

Did they believe that? Some thought it was madness, but that's the truth. And the Lord will fight for you. And he will carry you. "He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 1:32

²⁰ Deuteronomy 1:30

²¹ See Deuteronomy 1:30

²² Ibid.

²³ Exodus 14:14

will gather; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”²⁴

Now the Lord has been faithful in giving water and manna and quail and yet Moses addresses the core problem. It was unbelief. That is the core problem. You can argue with people all the time.

You know, we were on an airplane yesterday and, you know, Taylor was in front of us and he was sitting next to someone and he was appealing for the gospel to this person and after it was over I think we all realized it is not reasoning that leads people to Jesus Christ. It is the gospel. It is an awareness of sin and righteousness and judgment and the mercy of God. And that is what wins people to Christ.

You can argue all day long about this proposition and that proposition, but the heart of the matter is unbelief, unbelief. And only God can shake that. And we ought to be so aware that we have this one great message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is powerful. And it can work to cause belief.

So you see this is a demonstration of heart felt unbelief. This is another sign of depravity.

And then the next, number three, a revealing of the punishments for sin. And then what we find is a recollection of the punishments that came because the children of Israel would not go into the Promised Land. And Moses is recounting what happened 40 years before where he announced, “You can’t go in the Promised Land. We are going to wander for 40 years and those of you who are here, your dead carcasses will be left in the desert and a new generation will enter it, but it will be 40 years.”

And so there is real punishment for sin. We think that because the blood of Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness and that we are saved by grace it means that we are living in a no fault zone. That is not what the Bible teaches. You don’t live in a no fault zone. Sin has its barbs. Its poison does kill things in your soul and we need to recognize that.

The grace of Jesus Christ is greater than all of our sins, but we still suffer from disobedience. We still will find the weeds having killed something and that is the terrifying part of sin. And so we must be a people who turn from it. God does chastise those he loves and he withholds things from those who disobey him.

And then there is really a sort of a bright spot in the midst of this. There is a mention of Joshua and his character and his role is defined. And Joshua who was the one whose heart was pure before God and Moses tells the people, “Encourage him, follow him. Don’t be like that your forefathers were in the wildernesses.”

And then we find, number four, an instance of false repentance. So, so far we have seen this reasoned rebellion, this heart of our depravity. We have seen what heart felt unbelief

²⁴ Isaiah 40:11

looks like. We have seen that God punishes sin and that there is really not a no fault zone for sin.

And then we find something that is so common among us and that is a false repentance and we see this in verse 41.

“Then you answered and said to me, ‘We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.’ And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain.”²⁵

So what happens? Remember Moses is remembering 40 years before of what happened back there and he said, “You know, you repented and you strapped on your weapons and you went. But it was not true repentance.

It was an example of what Jesus spoke of, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”²⁶

It was faked. It was lip service. They said, “We have sinned,” but really they were just sorry. They were just sorry about the terrible results that were ahead of them

And that happens all the time. You know that happens when you are raising your children. Sometimes you have a child who repents, but he is really just trying to escape a punishment. There is no heart felt repentance there. They might say all the right words, but their hearts have never changed. And that’s a danger to us when we have children who will tell us what we want to hear, but they are just words.

And that is what it was with the children of Israel, just words. And there, yes, with the words were tears and things like that. Tears are no evidence of the work of God and as it was here. They confessed with their lips, but their hearts were far from him. They were sorry for the consequences of the disobedience. But they did not have true faith.

You know, God never demanded perfect obedience from his people. He calls us to it, but yet he desires a brokenness and a humility of heart. He desires a contrite heart... a heart that loves him and keeps his commandments as a result.

But here we find that they had not a heart, do you see that? They had not a heart. That was the issue. They had the words, but they didn’t have the heart.

Have any of you had just the words? Do you have words today, but not the heart? You know there are... the Bible says that there are some with us that are not really with us because they only have the words. Maybe they like the culture. Maybe they are responding to the guilt. But their hearts have not bowed. Has your heart bowed before Jesus Christ? Have you had true heart felt repentance? Do you desire to love him in your heart?

²⁵ Deuteronomy 1:41

²⁶ See Matthew 15:8

If you hear these words now and you say, “Yes, Lord, I do. I desire to obey you, I do. I want to love you with all my heart. I see that I am a sinner. I see that I would be cast into hell if it weren’t for the blood of Jesus Christ.” If you say, “Yes, I believe you have resurrected from the dead and are seated at the right hand of God and you have promised to care for me all my life long,” if this is the desire of your heart I would say you are converted. Your heart is toward God and you have demonstrated a heart that is consistent with your confession. But a confession is meaningless.

Let me just say this. I think we should always be very careful with verbal confessions because anybody can say words. Even the verbal confessions of your children or even your own. We should always be examining ourselves to see if we are in the faith. And so here what we find is an instance of false repentance, of lip service only.

And then, finally, we find the resulting tears of regret in verses 42 to 46.

And the LORD said to me, “Tell them, “Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.” So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen.”²⁷

There, again, we find the reason that we say this was mere lip service. It said that they repented of their sins, but it wasn’t true repentance because they would not listen. That is the evidence of true conversion. Your ears desire to listen. You say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” That is the sign of a converted heart.

And then, “But rebelled against the command of the LORD, and presumptuously went up into the mountain.”²⁸

You see, nothing had really changed.

And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah. Then you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you. So you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you spent there.”²⁹

So the children of Israel continued to rebel and they went off to war and it says here that they were chased away like bees. And it is interesting. I don’t know if you have ever been around bee keepers. My mother-in-law was a wonderful bee keeper for many, many years and so I had a little window into what it is like to keep bees.

But are you familiar with the smoker? If you use a smoker and the bees will deflect from the smoke. And the word that is used here of these bees is like... it brings this image of

²⁷ Deuteronomy 1:42-43

²⁸ Deuteronomy 1:43

²⁹ Deuteronomy 1:44-46

smoking. In other words the children of Israel were smoked. They were smoked by these other nations and one of the seven nations of the Canaanites and what happened was that the children of Israel's lusts got the best of them. They lost their self control. They rushed into the quagmire and were destroyed there.

That is what happens when you reject the will of the Lord. You end up getting slaughtered in the swamp. You end up getting smoked by your oppressors.

And so here is the wisdom of God for sinners is to be saved from getting smoked, from getting slaughtered in the swamp, from losing it in the land of fear and terror. That is what we see here.

And so we leave the chapter with people weeping in Kadesh. Remember last time we were together we said, "Remember Kadesh, remember Kadesh."

What does Kadesh Barnea mean to you? Well, it can mean the place of weeping where you heard the appeals of God. You saw his goodness toward you. You listened to his voice that said, "I have a good land. I have a future for you." And yet you rebel and you always end up in the same place when you rebel and that is the place of weeping.

And so that is what we find here in this text is a description of our depravity: the reasoned rebellion that we always have; the demonstration of heart felt unbelief that steals every good thing from us; the revealing of God's punishments for sins, that there is not a no fault zone for sin and sinners; and we have seen what false repentance looks like. It says the words, but it doesn't really have a heart. And then, finally, the resulting tears, the tears at Kadesh Barnea, your tears and my tears for the things that we wished we had done differently.

And so here we find ourselves coming full circle again, from the goodness of God to a call to repentance.

So let me just give you four questions by way of application of this. And, first of all, are you in a time of fear? Are you in a time of fear? Do you fear that if you obey God will not come through? Or are you a daughter who fears keeping the commandments of God because you are afraid of the future? Are you a young man who somehow thinks that if you obey God something will be stolen from you? Are you an old man who has something on your mind now and you are reasoning it out and now is the time to turn back? Is fear driving you, fear of the loss of the blessings of God? I pray that God would drive out this kind of fear in us, that he would help us.

And then another question. Are you in a time of delay? The children of Israel were in a time of delay. They did not want to obey. They wanted to hold back. They said, "Well, you know, our brothers have discouraged us. The cities are big. The giants are there..."

Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. Are you in a period of delay? Is there anything that God has for you that you have put on delay?

Notice this. Know this for sure. This delay will land you in Kadesh Barnea weeping. Don't delay. It is a conveyor belt to weeping.

And then the third question. Are you in a time of tears? Are you in a time of tears? Things have happened as a result of your disobedience. We just have to acknowledge that all of God's people have elements of this in their lives. We need to acknowledge our past sins, repent of them and move forward. You know, set our eyes on Canaan's land now. Set aside those things that have gone before. There is no reason to overly lament the past. These are things that have happened. So move forward. Leave the past behind. If you are in a time of tears acknowledge the goodness and the sweetness of God and move forward.

And then, finally, are you in a time of repentance or are you in this other time, a time of false repentance? God desires hearts that are turned towards him.

And we all are faced with fears for the future if we would obey God. We all have the 80/20 rule working against us and it will always be that way. God's people have always been a minority and that will never ever change. And so we need to make peace with that.

We didn't come to faith for popularity. We came to faith because of sin. And we cannot engage our faith for popularity and acceptance because we will always be the minority. And yet God has blessings for his people. And that is why he says, "Do not fear or be discouraged. Do not be terrified. Do not be afraid. The Lord your God who goes before you he will fight for you and he will do all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord carried you as a man carries his son. Yet for all that you did not believe the Lord your God."³⁰

And I pray that God would give us a great sense of his beauty and his goodness as we see our depravity played before us as we just have now and that God would open our hearts and that there would be an awakening.

And know this. An awakening cannot happen unless we understand our depravity and unless we understand the sweetness of the kingdom of heaven and that we cannot stop pondering it and letting it burn in our hearts and speaking of it as we sit in the house, when we walk by the way, when we lie down and when we rise up.

Let's pray.

Lord, you have issued commands to us not to be terrified and I pray that you would help us, Lord, that you would come along side and pour your spirit out upon us. I do pray that there would be a great awakening, that hearts would burn, that churches would fill, that repentance and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ would be seen. Oh Lord, give it to us in Jesus' name. Amen.

³⁰ See Deuteronomy 1:29-32

