

Where do we stand today? - recognising our covenant place

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and you'll find it at the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter 1, page 145. And after our introduction last week, we're getting into the beginning of the book this week.

I've given you there also, as a handout, a bit of an outline for the book, which I hope will help you. Please do keep it, take it home, or pop it into your Bible at home as you're reading this book as we study.

And it gives us a bit of orientation as to where we'll be going and how the book fits together. But we're beginning this morning to read chapter 1. These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, beyond the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the Arabah, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, Liban, Hazoroth, and Dizahab.

It's an 11 days journey from Horeb, that's Mount Sinai. From Horeb, by the way of Mount Sinai. It's 11 days journey to Kadesh Barnea, the place of entry to the land of Canaan.

In the 40th year, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel, according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment to them.

[1 : 19] After he had defeated Sion, the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and in Edri. Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law, this instruction.

Saying,

And we came to Kadesh Barnea. And I said to you, You've 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 in, 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 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 to the hill country, and came to the valley of Eshcol, and spied it out. And they took into their hands some of the fruit of the land, and brought it down to us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land the Lord our God is giving us.

[4 : 27] 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's brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hands 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've seen the son of the 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've 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 this word, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went before you in the way to seek 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.

[5 : 50] 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 he has wholly followed the Lord. Even with me, the Lord was angry on your account, and said, You also 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 said you would become a 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've 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 whole 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. That you would not listen. You rebelled against the command of the Lord, and presumptuously went up into the whole country.

[7 : 08] Then the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you, as bees do, and beat you down in Seir as far as the Horma.

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 many days, the days that you remained there.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, this is a story, isn't it, of God's great grace, despite his people's constant rebellion.

Well, please turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 1, the passage we read. If you have a church Bible, that's page 145. Following our introduction to the book last Sunday, as we turn this morning to look at Deuteronomy chapter 1, we'll see, I think, that it's a chapter all about God's people recognizing their place in their day and their generation in the ongoing covenant story of God's everlasting kingdom.

Hence my title, Where Do We Stand Today? Where do you stand today in your walk with the Lord? In your Christian life?

[8 : 36] In your progress along the way that God has called you to in the Christian life? Now that's a searching question. As we ask it of ourselves, as we ask it of our whole fellowship together here as a church.

It could be, it could be rather a despairing, a discouraging question, couldn't it? if we're realistic about ourselves. Being realistic is important.

But of course, when we are realistic about ourselves, without forgetting also to be realistic about our God, then things are usually much, much more encouraging.

Where do you stand today? I think probably John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace, gave one of the best answers when he said, I'm not what I ought to be. I'm not what I want to be.

Nor am I even what I hope to be. But still, I'm not what I once used to be. And by God's grace, I am what I am.

[9 : 42] You see, he's remembering the grace of God alongside his own shortcomings. And so at the same time, he has that palpable sense of deliverance from the past, but also a sense of destiny for the future.

And therefore, a great sense of urgency for today, of pressing on with God while it is still today. And that spirit very much echoes the sense of the destiny and the urgency that Moses, the great preacher, conveys to his people all through this book of Deuteronomy.

Today, is one of the great words of the book. I counted, I think, at least 75 times you find that word, today or this day. You see it there in chapter 1, verse 11.

And again, in verse 39, behold, today. You see it all through chapter 2 and 3, when Moses says that all through the wilderness journeys, every new stage, God was speaking to them that day, today.

You see it in chapter 4, where he's now saying, all of these commands that the Lord sets before you, you must obey them today. All the way through the book, right to the end, chapter 30, where he sets before them and says, today, I've set before you life and good, death and evil.

[10 : 53] Now choose life. Choose life today. God's word always comes freshly and urgently to his people today. And it demands a response, a fresh response, to follow him, to hear him, to heed him, today.

And here, here in Deuteronomy chapter 1, it is plain, isn't it, that Israel, like John Newton, are not where they should be. Verses 2 and 3, flag it up like a red flag before us. And we are 11 days from Horeb, from Sinai, to Kadesh Barnea, the place of entry, to Canaan. But 40 years on, and they're only just getting there at last. 40 years in the wilderness. They should have all the time been years spent inside the land of God's promise. They're not where they should be, but they are not now where they once were. They are at last on the brink of the Jordan. And it is, by God's grace alone, that they are where they are. But, if they are to move on with the Lord, not slip back, and by the way, those are the only two alternatives in anybody's walk with the Lord.

[12:11] You're either walking on with the Lord, or you are slipping back. There's no such thing as stasis in the life of faith. And if they are to go on with the Lord, they need always to be remembering the grace that has brought them safe thus far, through all these many dangers, and toils, and snares.

And the grace which alone can go on carrying them forward, to fulfill their calling. They need to remember. But of course, remembering in the Bible never just means recalling things from the past, and leaving them consigned to the past. No. To remember means to relive that reality now, today, in the present. To remember God's grace means to continue to rely on God's grace, today. To go on, knowing that the grace that has helped us in the past will go on and lead us home. Remember the Lord is a constant command through the Bible. And it means not just to recall things about God, but it means to revere God. To rejoice in Him. To bow the knee to Him, today, this day, every day. Because you see, you can never live on past grace alone.

[13:26] You can never live on past faith. Every day is a new day of grace that calls for obedience, today. Every day is a fresh experience of God's love, but it calls for loyalty in return, today.

So there are very, very important lessons for all of us today in a chapter like this. Paul reminds the Corinthians of that in 1 Corinthians 10. The Hebrews writer reminds them in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4.

We must learn so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, so that we hold firm and endure in true faith to the end, not just in the past.

So we all need to examine ourselves today. Where do I stand today with this God? So let's keep that question in our minds as we look at what Moses taught that generation of God's people to remember about God and about their own hearts so that they would not fall back, so that they would keep on moving on, taking their place in the covenant story of God's unfolding kingdom, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus.

First of all, in verses 1 to 5, Moses calls them to remember God's astonishing promises and provision, or rather, sorry, his astonishing patience and perseverance, patience and perseverance with the people who are deeply disappointing and so often terribly underachieving and disobedient.

[15:02] If you look at these verses, first of all, it just seems to be a kind of random group of facts about geography and history. It might put you off. I don't know about you, I loved history at school. I had a fantastic history teacher, actually, who really got me interested.

But I owe a great deal to her because in my third year of secondary school, until then, I'd been a complete waster. I was only interested in rugby, nothing else. But she really ignited my interest in the study of history and really helped me enormously.

But I never felt the same about geography and again, it was due to teachers. You know, teachers, you can have a really big influence. My geography teacher was a strange old geezer with a glass eye and he used to nip out, there was a side room from his classroom and he used to nip out halfway through the class every week for a fag and we were pretty sure, also a dram or two because he came back usually a bit wobbly and we always used to change our seats and move around in the classroom when he was out so he was always totally confused when he came back in and probably that's the reason I hated geography and I know nothing about geography today. I'm not quite sure why I told you that but anyway, back to geography. What we're reading about here is what you might call theological geography.

Very, very important. In other words, these details about places, they have a very important message for God's people. They're not just here to remind us that God who speaks to them now is a God who spoke to his people in the past.

[16 : 33] They're here to remind us that when God speaks, it means something and there must be a response because God's revelation always demands response and it always provokes response from its hearers.

And that response will either be obedient faith which leads to blessing or it will be disobedient unbelief which leads only to disaster.

And if you look back in Israel's history, you see that these places were fraught with destiny. Paran here. That was the area of Kadesh Barnea, the great place of fateful refusal of Israel to go into the land.

Hazoroth, likewise mentioned here, was the place where even Aaron and Miriam rebelled against the command of Moses and God judged Aaron with leprosy. You can read about that in the middle chapters of Numbers.

They made a wrong response to God's word at so many of these places here. And these place names therefore proclaim a great warning. You can't treat the word of God with indifference.

[17 : 44] You know that from your history. That's what he's saying. Now we need to know that too, don't we? Whenever we hear God's word ourselves, whether it's in our own discoveries, as we read the Bible ourselves, whether it's in our group studies together and release the word, the youth group or whatever it is, especially when we gather together as a church to hear his authoritative word to all of us, when the spirit of the Lord promises to be in our midst, we cannot take God's word lightly.

Whenever we hear God's word, it will either draw us nearer to him and nearer to our true destiny in him or it will be driving us away from him.

It can never be inconsequential. That's why in Hebrews chapter 12, the apostle warns us so clearly, don't refuse him who is speaking. Don't refuse the warnings that he speaks from heaven.

That's why our attitude as we come together, whenever we come around God's word is so important. We don't come casually. We must come with reverence and awe, says the apostle, because our God is a consuming fire.

You can't trifle with him. He won't be hoodwinked like my befuddled geography teacher. He sees.

So these verses, you see, are start warning to that new generation, but also they are words of great hope and great comfort because despite everything that's gone on in the past, despite all their sin and their failure, all that wasted 40 years, God is still speaking to them.

[19 : 24] He's not abandoned his people to silence. We have three times here. Verse 1, these are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel after all of these things.

Verse 3, Moses spoke to Israel all that God had given him. Verse 5, Moses undertook to explain all this instruction. He is the God who still has a promise of grace for all who will be his people.

And he is still the God, verse 4, who is fighting for his people to defeat their enemies. These two kings as he just done so recently as they approached the border of the promised land. You see, these verses are telling God's people they still have a future.

And Israel still has a future. They're saying God's plan has not faltered even because of all this sin. And that's such an important message, is it not?

Because they can look so often as we look at our world that God's plan must have faltered for this world. It seems so often that his promises are going to come to nothing. That's certainly what many early Gentile and indeed Jewish Christians thought in the first century when the apostle Paul was writing to their churches.

[20 : 39] Paul struggled himself, didn't he, with the fact that the vast majority of his own countrymen, the Jews, rejected their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. But remember what he wrote to the Romans. Does their faithfulness, faithlessness, nullify the faithfulness of God?

By no means. It is not as though the word of God has failed. Rather it's that his plan is far greater and more wonderful than any of us could ever have imagined.

That even through his people's rejection of God's covenant and his Messiah, that will work a far greater salvation. Reconciliation goes to the whole world, says Paul, and through that all God's Israel will be saved.

God's grace abounds even over the chief of sinners and that's what Paul said of his very own life. So there's great comfort in these verses, isn't there?

Especially for anybody who's here today who feels that as they think about their own past history, their own past geography, that it's a sad story, a story of disobedience, a story of disappointment to

God.

[21 : 54] There's hope if you're here today, if you're still listening to God, then God is speaking to you still with words of hope, with promises of blessing, with promises of a future, a destiny with him.

Amazing grace is still being held out to you today and to me. But of course, just as with that generation, you need to recognize the urgency of your place in his story.

Today is a decisive moment for you, indeed for all of us. Where do we stand today? Are we ready today to trust God, to obey God afresh, to move on with God?

Well, remember, God is a God of astonishing patience and perseverance with frail and sinful people. He's still speaking to us. But his grace does warn us in these verses.

That's what Paul says when he quotes these things to the Corinthian church. Don't make those mistakes again, is the point. There is a way out. God has given you a way out and you can endure, but you must seize that day today.

[23 : 09] This is the day to take hold of everything God has promised you. And he has given you everything you need for life and godliness, says the apostle Peter, in his great and precious promises.

And in fact, that's exactly what verses 6 to 25 lay out here for Israel. As Moses says to them, remember God's abundant promises, God's abundant provision.

Everything you've needed for a life of faithfulness and loyalty, he has given you. It's easy, isn't it, when life has not gone perhaps as we hoped it would. Especially with it doesn't seem to fit with what we think God has promised to us.

It's easy, isn't it, to blame God. It's his failure that things have not turned out as they ought. It's his failure that I'm not where I am today.

And Israel very, very often blamed God for their failures, for their lack, for their deprivation. But you see, the big point in these verses surely is this, that it is emphatically not, because of God's lack of provision, that they're not now enjoying the bounty of the promised land.

[24 : 24] Look what he's given them, verses 6-8, tell of the promise of that wonderful land. Just a few days journey from Horeb, from Sinai, waiting for them. And yet in verse 6, even way back then, God had to say to them, get up, get moving, you've had long enough here at this mountain.

And they stayed over a year. If you read Exodus 19 in Numbers chapter 10, over a year before they even began to move on, when the Lord had put that wonderful land right in front of their eyes.

Why on earth were they settled down in that terrible place? Verse 19 calls the desert the great and terrifying wilderness, when God had put all of that before them. So he's saying, look, move on.

Isn't that enough that I've put all of this in front of you? It seemed not. Just as I suppose most of the time, the truth is that as Christian believers, our lives don't echo the Lord Jesus' command to seek first the kingdom that he has put in front of us, to live every day for the heavenly glory, not for the earthly treasures that moth and rust will one day just sweep away from us.

Are we like Paul, really, forgetting all these other things and this one thing we do, pressing on for the goal, the prize of the upward call in Jesus Christ?

[25 : 57] Maybe if things are not as we would like them to be, maybe the joy we feel we're lacking in our lives is because we aren't nearly interested enough in the great joy that he really has set before us.

And that joy is therefore not filtering into our lives every day in all that we do. God had promised these people a land, set it before them. And in verses 10 and 11 he says he promised them a great seed and even now he was already multiplying them like the stars of heaven.

And he says, I hope this is just the beginning of what God has promised. Mind you, these verses also do show that the growth of God's church also means the growth of problems.

Did you see that when we read it? More people, even when it's more of God's people, just means more sin, doesn't it? Verse 12, how can I bear by myself the weight and burden of you and the strife?

I find it personally quite encouraging that Moses is, I think, a lot more realistic than many of the church growth and church planting gurus that you hear today because what he's saying is that whenever there is great growth among the people of God is going to be very messy, it's going to be very frustrating, sometimes it's going to be an exhausting business and that's what Moses is speaking about here.

[27 : 19] Well, we saw that all the time when we studied the book of Acts in the New Testament, didn't we, in those early days of extraordinary growth of the church and there was great opposition from outside but also at the same time there was a lot of strife inside the church, wasn't there?

Remember Acts chapter 6, all those arguments between the widows and the different groups about the food and so on? And there was a great murmuring among the people, do you remember? That same perpetual sign of the Israelites in rebellion against God under Moses here in verse 26, you rebelled, you murmured in your tents.

And the apostles, remember in Acts chapter 6, had to stop, they had to rework the whole leadership structure of the church so that the church could go on growing and the gospel could continue to advance. Well, we've known some of those difficulties, some of those strains, haven't we, in our own church, especially in the very rapid growth in our Farsi ministry.

But we can learn from the provision that God gave to the early church in Acts and we can learn from the provision that God gave here under Moses. And that's the emphasis in these verses, isn't it? God did provide.

He didn't leave them struggling. He provided leaders, verse 15, of stature, wise and experienced men. Not to lord it over others, they were to be brothers, not fathers.

[28 : 38] But with God given authority to lead, to judge, it was a necessity, but God provided. And as they grew and as it became more difficult, God gave, verse 18, instruction.

He gave them commands for everything that they needed. You see, unlike pagans, God's people have this extraordinary privilege. Pagan religions, people have no idea if they're pleasing their gods or not.

Do I need another sacrifice and another? Will he be pleased with me? How can I not live in fear? Not so with the people of the living God. He gives us all the instruction that we need, everything we need that pertains to life and godliness so that we can know how to live, to love him and praise him. And verse 19, he gave them protection through every danger, toil and snare, through the great and terrifying wilderness. That phrase crops up again later on and it adds, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsting ground where there was no water, it was a grim place.

And yet Moses says he brought you water out of the flinty rock and fed you with manna to do you good. Even in that place there was extraordinary provision and protection provided by God.

[29 : 58] And when they came to the brink of the land of Canaan at Kadesh, you'll see there in verse 20, he reiterated his promise of the land. Verse 22, it's yours, there it is, go up, take possession, God has given it to you, he will fight for you.

But they were still fearful and apprehensive. And so God made concession even to their fears and their weakness to send spies in, to give them even greater assurance again.

That's a detail by the way that's new here, you don't get that in Numbers chapter 13. We're told about the spies and all of that, but it's only here that we realize that it was a concession to the people's fears. They asked for the spies.

They shouldn't have needed that. They had God's word plenty, plenty of times. They should have believed his word, just as Gideon remember should have believed God's word.

But he was fearful and weak and so God said, okay, okay, you can have your wet fleece, dry fleece pantomime, as William still once called it. He gave extra added reassurance to the fearful hearted.

[31 : 06] And Israel got their spies to give extra added reassurance. And they got it, verse 25. They all came back and said, it is a good land that the Lord is giving to us.

God's God's God's God's God's God's God's commands us in the way of life. So difficult to believe that his commands are good and for our blessing and not for our harm.

Why do we harbor such perverse thoughts about God and what he wants of us? Oh, I'm worried that God will make me, want me to do the one thing in life that I absolutely hate the most.

I'm kind of worried that God will make me want to marry this sort of person that I really couldn't stand. Why do we think things like that? I know that if I live the way God commands me to in the Bible, it will make my life miserable, not fulfilled and joyful and happy.

God has done everything to show us that that is not so. Of course, he sent his own son, the Lord Jesus, to tell us unequivocally that his joy is giving us not evil but good things.

[32 : 22] Which father of you will give to his son a serpent when he asks for a fish or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give not devils but give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

It is a good land and a good life that the Lord is calling us to. Look at all his promises, look at all his provision all through your history.

That's what Moses is saying. God's given you everything you need for life and godliness. How then could you not go on and advance with your God in the way he's called you in life?

life? That's a question for all of us to ponder, isn't it? Especially if you are conscious that your life isn't in the place that you feel it should be today.

Because you see, friends, the clear answer that's given here is that it's not God's failure to provide and to promise and to equip and to instruct and to lead.

[33 : 33] it's ours. And that failure stems from rebellion, from disobedient hearts.

You see, the depth of the Lord's provision and even his concession to all their weakness in this chapter just highlights for us the stark truth that it wasn't just natural fear that held them back from the land of Canaan.

it was deep rank rebellion and unbelief in their hearts. And that's the sad and penetrating message of the rest of the chapter from verse 26 to the end.

Moses says to them, remember your appalling perversity and presumption. Verse 26, you would not go up but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God.

A clear message, the overwhelming message of the spies was this is a good land and the Lord has given it. But they chose to fix on what 10 of the 12 spies had come back and said about the strength of the opposition.

[34 : 42] What they say here in these verses. Instead of believing God, trusting his promises, they refused to trust him. Despite again and again the Lord reiterating patiently his promise to fight for them.

Again, verse 30, he will fight for you. Don't be afraid. And all the proof that they had of that from the past, he did it in Egypt. Your own eyes saw it. You've seen it all through your history.

And yet, verse 32, in spite of this word, you did not believe the Lord your God. And notice that. It's so, so important. What does it mean not to believe?

What does it mean not to have faith in God? Unbelief is not a sort of unfortunate thing that you have no control over.

People sometimes say that, well, I've tried to believe, I'd like to believe, I'd like to have faith like you, but I can't. No, no, no, no. You did not believe here in verse 32.

[35 : 45] It's just another way of saying what's said in verse 26. You would not go up, but you rebelled. It's there again in verse 43. Do you see? I spoke to you, but you would not listen.

You rebelled against the command of the Lord. That's what unbelief is. It's deliberate refusal of the revelation of God. Deliberate rebellion against the command of God.

Deliberate scorn, therefore, of the person of God. And all of that is simply a deep manifestation of the perversity in the human heart that rejects the rightful rule of our Lord and our creator.

it's a willing blindness, it's a refusal to believe the manifest grace of God. You saw it all, verse 31.

You saw God's extraordinary grace and mercy, yet you would not believe.

And that's why you see in verse 34 and following, the result can only be judgment. Psalm 106 verse 15 puts it this way, he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease upon them.

[37 : 00] They went back from the brink of the land into that vast and terrifying wilderness. And the apostle says in Hebrews chapter 3, those who heard, yet rebelled, who sinned, who were disobedient, we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

unbelief is. And that's why there are salutary warnings for all of us. That's why the New Testament and Hebrews 3 and 4 and Paul and 1 Corinthians 10, that's why he picks them up and says, these are warnings of grace for you, to keep you from going that way of disaster, but to bring you to a penitence, to obedient faith, to trust in God.

And one real warning from this chapter for us today is a warning against grumbling. Do not grumble as some of them did, says Paul to the Corinthians, and were destroyed.

Because you see, the truth is that grumbling and self-absorption like that within the community of faith actually is an expression of rebellion and unbelief. In verse 27, you see, it says, they murmured, they grumbled.

And what they said was, the Lord hates us. And verse 34 says, the Lord heard their words and was angered.

[38 : 27] Literally, it says, and I think the King James Version puts it this way, it says, the Lord heard the voice of their words. In other words, what it means is, the Lord heard what they were really saying.

He heard the voice of their hearts, just as Jesus perceived the hearts when people came to him with all sorts of pious language, but actually were dressing up deep out of visceral hatred of him. So their words said, we're afraid. The opposition is great. They're much bigger than us. The Lord must have hated us. But what their hearts were saying, and what the Lord heard, was that they were saying, we're very angry with God, and we hate God.

God, we're going to be very careful, don't we? When we're prone to grumble, express disappointment, dissatisfaction with our life, or with the church, or when God hasn't answered our prayer the way we'd like it to or hoped for, or our marriage seems to not be what we thought we'd signed up to, or our family life, or whatever it might be.

Because God hears the real voice of our words. He hears what our hearts are really saying, and alas, very often what our hearts are saying is, I'm angry with God, and I'm not going to listen to what he's telling me to do anymore.

[40 : 03] And we're rebelling against him. Again, Psalm 126 says, Israel despised God's pleasant land, the life that he had set before them.

They had no faith in his promise, they murmured in their tents, they did not obey his voice. And we need to be very careful, don't we, of a grumbling spirit like that before God.

It's a symptom of very serious and deep pathology of the heart. And we need to be fearful also of this warning against the vast spoiling legacy of sin.

Verse 37 tells us even Moses was affected by their sin. He was denied entry to the promised land. It's clear from Numbers 20 and from Deuteronomy chapter 34, Moses himself tells us that he also was culpable, in some way he rebelled against the Lord at the waters of Meribah.

But what he's saying here and in chapter 3 and in chapter 4 clearly makes the point that that whole situation arose and was brought about because of the sinful refusal of all Israel to enter God's land at that time.

[41 : 15] And that bitter root of sin, it was like bad leaven. And that's what sin does, it poisons, it can spoil the life of the whole community of faith.

Right, a whole generation can be desperately damaged. And the consequences of sin spread, spread like a virus. even when there's forgiveness, there can be such a damaging legacy among the life of God's people.

Numbers chapter 14 tells us plainly God did relent, God forgave their sin, nevertheless that command remained, turn round and go back, you will not enter the land.

And God continued to bless his people that generation, he cared for them in the desert, he blessed them, but within those limitations that their own sinfulness had set for that whole generation.

That's a warning, isn't it, for every generation likewise. Hebrews 3 tells us plainly we must exhort one another daily so that we should not fall short and be destroyed, our hearts hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[42 : 26] That's a warning to the Christian church. And there's another warning here also in verses 41 to 46, a warning that is so necessary too for all of us.

It's a warning about failing to take sin seriously enough in God's eyes. As if that sort of rebellion against God was a small thing, as if it could be swept aside and just a quick, oh sorry Lord, and everything will be fine again, just as it was before.

We'd love to think that, wouldn't we? It's not so. Israel thought they could do just that. We'll go up, we'll fight, we'll make it all better, Lord.

And the Lord says in verse 42, no, don't go, don't fight, I'm not with you. And again they rebelled. And so their repentance, you see, wasn't real repentance at all, was it?

It was just more unbelief and presumption upon God's grace. But God's grace, friends, is not cheap grace. It cannot be abused, it cannot be presumed upon. God's grace takes sin desperately seriously indeed.

[43 : 34] And that's why often a mark of real repentance is you recognize there will be consequences of sin. And that things can't always be back the way they were before, even if there is forgiveness.

That's why, for example, when a Christian leader falls into grave sin, sexual sin, say, commits adultery, has an affair, part of knowing that that repentance is real, is that he will say, well, I cannot, I cannot hold this position any longer.

Not because he's unforgiven by God, but because of the consequences. He's forfeited the right and the ability to hold such a place for a long, long time, maybe forever.

On the other hand, if he says, oh, well, God's forgiven me, so I can just carry on and everything will be like it is before, that's a surefire sign. And there's been no real repentance, no real understanding of sin.

It's just shallow. Or even just sham altogether. And Israel's repentance here was shallow. Indeed, it was just sham, wasn't it?

[44 : 39] And that's why this whole episode ended in disaster and defeat in verse 44. Look at verse 45. Aren't those terrible words? You returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord did not listen to your voice or give ear to you.

There's few things so disastrous as being so out of touch with God's holiness that you don't even realize any longer when the Lord is not with you and has departed from you.

Remember Samson in Judges, is it chapter 16, where after finally he's been seduced by Delilah and given away the secret of his strength and his hair has been shaved and the Philistines come and he jumps up to give them a good beating as he expected to and we're told he did not know that the Lord had left him.

It was a disaster for him, a disaster for all the people, just as here, verse 46. All those days, a whole generation with all its promise, with all its potential for God, wasted in the wilderness.

holiness. There's a lot of that presumption around today, isn't there, in the church, the professing church of God. Whole denominations, whole groupings, increasingly will not listen, rebel against God's clear command in scripture when he says, no, do not go that way.

[46 : 08] And they say, we will go that way and the Holy Spirit is with us and the Lord is teaching us and the Lord will fight for us. They need to read these words, don't they?

Do not go up. I am not in your midst. And we need to remember these words too, don't we? When we're tempted as we are, very often to presume upon God's grace.

They say, well, I'll just do that my way and not God's way. I'll just go against that command of God because I want to. God will forgive me and all will be well. Everything will be as it was before. No, no, no, no.

No. Friends, the New Testament tells us these things are written for us. And the whole point of this chapter for us, as it was for these first people who heard it at Moses' mind, is that it shouts to I don't go that way.

It needn't be that way for you. By God's grace, you are where you are today. And God is still speaking to you. Remember his abundant promise promises and provision.

[47 : 14] He's given you everything you need for life and godliness. And remember, never forget the appalling perversity, the presumption that does leak, lurk deep in our hearts.

Don't refuse him again. And see, see where you are today because of God's astonishing patience, his astonishing perseverance with you despite all that you've done and all that you've not done.

Remember all these things and resolve in your heart to follow him wholeheartedly today like Caleb did, like Joshua did. Learn from them to trust and obey God's command.

Remembering God really is giving us blessing. He's not an evil imposter. He's not leading us in a way of disaster. He's leading us into life in all its fullness.

promise. Trust him and you'll see the wonders of his blessing. You'll enter that true destiny, your place in that great covenant story of his everlasting kingdom.

[48 : 24] That's what the Bible calls repentance, isn't it? Turning away from your rebellion. Humbly receiving God's words, God's commands. Walking in his ways with all of your heart, trusting his promises, not grumbling, not resisting him, but glorying in him, rejoicing in him.

Knowing that your God is a gracious father who carries you as a father carries his son. So where do you stand today?

Where do we all stand as people of this church today in 2017? Do we stand in that penitent faith? Or are we maybe standing in presumption and perversity in our hearts?

Is the voice of your heart responding to the word of God today and saying, the Lord has hated me? Is it full of bitterness for God? Or is it saying, it is a good land, a good life he is laying before me.

I will go with him his way gladly. Is it your heart full of the beauty of God and not the bitterness of God? Where do you stand today? William Shakespeare said this, there's a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.

[49 : 53] Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat.

We must take our current when it serves or lose our ventures. Or as the Bible puts it, perhaps more simply, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart as in the rebellion, but rather strive to enter that rest so that none of us may fall in that same sort of disobedience.

Where do you stand today? Let's pray. O Lord, God of great patience, great perseverance, who's given us as your people today better promises, better, more wonderful provision than ever the people of Moses had through the triumph of your glorious Son, our Savior.

Grant us, we pray, to be open in hearts, willing to receive your word of command on our lives so that we won't refuse him who warns us from heaven.

For how shall we, Lord, with such a better covenant, better promises, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? So help us, Lord, to encourage one another as long as it's called today to draw near through you, our great high priest, Christ, looking always to our Lord Jesus, that we might run with endurance the race that you have marked out for us, and so that we would know the joy of serving you as we ought and of inheriting the blessing that you have called us to in Jesus Christ.

[51 : 56] Hear us and help us, we pray, for Jesus Christ, our Savior's sake. Amen.