

Taking God Seriously: 2. He will be Faithful!

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, we turn now to our Bible reading, and we have a long reading this morning. We're back in Deuteronomy, and we've come to chapter 28, which is a chapter very much of two parts, and the contrast could not be greater.

It's a chapter that warns us to take God very seriously indeed. We may trifle with Him. We may think it easy to be unfaithful to our word, but He will be faithful to His word.

Deuteronomy 28, verse 1, page 168. If you faithfully obey the word, the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds, and the young of your flock.

Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading ball. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. Blessed shall be the fruit of the seed, and the fruit of your sisters, and the fruit of the goat.

[1 : 30] And the fruit of the seed will bow the way. Blessed shall be the fruit of your for the Wealth of the Baby. The Lord will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all you undertake, and He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as a people holy to Himself as He has sworn to you, if you will keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways.

and all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord and they shall be afraid of you and the Lord will make you abound in prosperity in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground within the land that the Lord swore to his fathers to give you.

The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands and you shall lend to many nations but you shall not borrow and the Lord will make you the head and not the tail.

You shall only go up and not down if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today being careful to do them and if you do not turn aside from them from any of the words that I command you today to the right hand or to the left to go after other gods to serve them but if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God to be careful to do all his commandments and statutes that I command you today then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.

[3 : 15] Cursed shall you be when you come in and cursed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and frustration in all that you undertake to do until you are destroyed and perish quickly on the account of the evil of your deeds because you have forsaken me.

The Lord will make the pestle and stick to you until he has consumed you off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. The Lord will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat with drought and with blight and with mildew.

They shall pursue you until you perish and the heavens over your head shall be bronze and the earth under you shall be iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder from heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them and you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth and there shall be no one to frighten them away. The Lord will strike you with boils of Egypt and with tumors and scab and itch of which you cannot be healed.

[4 : 27] The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind and you shall grope at noonday as the blind grope in darkness and you shall not prosper in your ways. You shall only be oppressed and robbed continually and there shall be no one to help you.

You shall betroth a wife but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard but you shall not enjoy its fruit. Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes but you shall not eat any of it.

Your donkey shall be seized before your face but not restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies but there shall be no one to help you. Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long but you will be helpless.

A nation that you've not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and all of your labors and you shall only be oppressed and crushed continually so that you're driven mad by all the sights that your eyes see.

The Lord will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. The Lord will bring you and your king whom he set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone and you shall become a horror a proverb and a byword among the peoples where the Lord will lead you away.

[5 : 54] You shall carry much seed into the field and gather in little for the locusts shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and dress them but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes for the worms shall eat them.

You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil for your olives shall drop off. You shall father sons and daughters but they shall not be yours for they shall go into captivity.

The cricket shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground. The sojourner who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you and you shall come down lower and lower and he shall lend to you and you shall lend not to him.

He shall be the head and you the tail. All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you're destroyed because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.

There shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart because of the abundance of all things.

[7 : 04] Therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you in hunger and thirst and nakedness and lacking everything and he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you.

The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away from the end of the earth swooping down like the eagle a nation whose language you do not understand a hard-faced nation whom you shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.

It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed. It shall leave you not grain or wine or oil the increase of your herds or the young of your flock until they've caused you to perish.

They shall besiege you in all your towns until the high and fortified walls in which you trusted came down throughout all your land and they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you and you shall eat the fruit of your womb the flesh of your sons and daughters whom the Lord your God has given you in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you.

The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother to the wife he embraces to the last of the children whom he has left so that he will not give to any of them the flesh of his children whom he is eating because he has nothing else left in the siege and in the distress over which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns.

[8 : 32] The most tender and refined woman among you who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender will begrudge to the husband she embraces to her son and to her daughter her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears because lacking everything she will eat them secretly in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns.

If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book that you may fear this glorious and awesome name the Lord your God then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions afflictions severe and lasting and sickness grievous and lasting and he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid and they shall cling to you every sickness also and every affliction that is not recorded in the book of this law the Lord will bring upon you until you are destroyed whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven you should be left few in number because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God and as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you and you should be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it and the Lord will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone which neither you nor your fathers have known and among these nations you shall find no respite and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul your life shall hang in doubt before you night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life in the morning you shall say if only it were evening and evening you shall say if only it were morning because of the dread that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes shall see and the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt a journey that I promise you should never make again and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves but there will be no buyer these are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab beside the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb

Amen well please turn to this chapter Deuteronomy 28 which I said is all about taking God seriously because he will be faithful to his word there's a refreshing bluntness isn't there about our Australian friends sometimes we Brits find it takes a bit of getting used to but it's there you see it in their street signs for example here in Britain for a one way street we have a rather subtle circle just with a line through the middle in Australia it says wrong way go back it's pretty plain you see it on their beach signs shark sighted keep out Rico Tice tells a story of once being on the beach I think it was Botany Bay near Sydney with the Australian evangelist John Chapman it was a really hot day and so Rico started to strip off and go for a swim

Chapman just pointed to him at the sign shark sighted keep out Rico being an Englishman said well surely we don't take that too literally do we to which Chapman replied well brother you are of age it's up to you and he rather sheepishly and quietly began to put his clothes back on it was a pretty unambiguous warning but of course people don't like warnings last week a Cambridge professor warned his students that the course was very tough and that if you spend your whole time at university drinking and carousing and never doing work you won't pass and you'll be thrown out and the students union said this it was deeply damaging to students feelings and their well-being to have to receive such a warning talk about the snowflake generation people don't like warnings but warnings are necessary in life and that professor knows students tendencies tendencies and temptations and he was being both honest and helpful and caring and compassionate in warning them because he didn't want them to lose their place at university he warned them in order to protect them to preserve their future and God knows that we need warnings and because he is gracious and compassionate he gives us his warnings in his gospel word to human beings he gives us both promises and warnings promises that lay out the way of blessing beautiful bountiful blessings that will overtake us and surround us not because we deserve them but because he is a God who delights to bless his people because he is a God of grace of benevolence a giving God who abounds in love but he also gives us warnings because he knows the realities of our stubborn rebellious hearts hearts that are hard wired to self harm and the need to self destruction because of our insistence on self rule on autonomous self control over our own lives thinking that we know better than all including God how to live our lives to the full and insisting that we don't need his grace certainly not the kind of grace that demands to have direction over all of our lives and because we are so deaf because we are in so much denial about eternal reality sometimes

God has to shout these warnings even louder and more vividly than an Australian beach sign so that we have to listen so we have to heed the warning and not foolishly wade on into the deep and deadly waters of danger and of death of everlasting danger and everlasting death which are ready to capture and destroy us and friends that is why a chapter like this is in front of us this morning because its message is the message of the whole gospel the whole bible

[15 : 31] Moses is articulating here God's unchanging gospel chapter 29 verse 1 here calls it the word of the covenant that God gave to Israel at that time in their ears but in the words of revelation chapter 14 verse 7 it is the eternal gospel which is now proclaimed to every tribe and language and people a gospel which shouts loudly take God seriously fear God says the angel give him glory for the hour of his judgment is come so worship him him who made the earth and the sea and the springs of water and to worship God means to hear him and to heed him in his command as he speaks words of eternal everlasting significance words of grace and mercy and love both in his promises and in his warnings and friends we need to take God seriously because even if people will trifle with him and refuse to be faithful to him abandoning the call of his covenant grace be clear he will be faithful to his gospel both in blessing that is eternal and if that blessing is refused and refuted and rejected yes in curse that is everlasting it was the

Lord Jesus himself the savior of men who spoke those awful words of warning about what he himself will say to many on that day of his coming depart from me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels into the outer darkness he called it where there will be weeping gnashing of teeth utter torment forever and ever God warns us that he will be faithful to his covenant word and we better take him seriously and take this chapter seriously because the apostle says it is written for us so today we must not harden our hearts we've got to heed these words take God seriously ourselves as he lays out for us both the transcendent call of his heaven but also the terrifying curse of hell let's look first at verses 1 to 14 which lay out the way of blessing this is the call of heaven that's what's described here the abundant blessing of belonging to

God's glorious kingdom and it comes only by receiving the grace proffered at his generous sovereign hand receiving it in humble obedient faith you can see the structure very easily the blessings are summarized in verses 1 to 6 and then they're expanded and expanded in verses 7 to 14 let me try and point out four key things that these verses emphasize for us first of all notice that the scope of God's blessing is pervasive and profound utterly and completely pervasive and profound encompassing the whole of human life as we can conceive it to be verses 3 to 6 give us these six beatitudes very similar to Jesus beatitudes in the sermon on the mount blessed shall you be and it's the totality of life described isn't it verse 3 urban life and rural life verse 4 blessing and fertility and in family and in field verse 5 the bread basket and the baking bowl verse 6 you're going out you're coming in the whole of life blessed richly abundantly pervasively that is the call of God to true life in all its fullness

I have come said Jesus that they might have life and have it abundantly and that utterly pervasive and profound blessing is what's expressed in these beatitudes and then expanded further in verses 7 to 14 victory over enemies verse 7 and again verse 13 always the head never the tail always up never down and verse 8 achievement satisfaction in all work in all labor same in verses 11 and 12 there's a sort of sandwich structure in these verses the center right in verses 9 and 10 the very heart of it I'll come back to that in a minute but you see here is pervasive profound blessing verse 12 the treasury of heaven opened raining down blessing on his people lavish abundance that he has established for this people that he himself has called to himself notice that verse 9 he has sworn to bless them and that's the second thing these blessings that are pervasive and profound they come by sheer promise and privilege don't they we can't rest a few verses like this out of context and read them as though here was some sort of mechanical way of prosperity you do certain things you pray certain things and God will give you a blessing like you put the penny in the slot machine or like you rub the lamp and the genie appears no no no no it's absolutely no sense here is there or indeed anywhere in this book indeed in the whole Bible that God's blessings ever come because of our merit or our deserving it's quite the reverse in verse 1 here in the second half it echoes the end of chapter 26 which spoke about God setting his people on high as he promised the Lord declares you to be a people for his treasured possession by his promise he's chosen you to be holy to him to keep his commands to be his people it's sheer grace and mercy that has chosen you you've only got to read back through the chapters we've already studied to see it's so clear Israel had absolutely nothing that they had done to deserve that call don't ever say says

God it's because you're a righteous people you're a stubborn people you're a stiff neck people you're a rebellious people constantly and yet in his great mercy and love he calls them into his abundant blessing it is sheer sovereign grace as it always is with God we by our nature says Paul we're children of wrath but God being rich in mercy in the great love with which he has loved us even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ it is by grace you've been saved so never think that we deserve God's blessing even though we are obedient to him remember what Jesus says in Luke 17 about the master and the servant master doesn't thank the servant when he does what he's paid to do it's his duty and when we've done everything that God demands of us he says we've only done our duty and yet as

[22 : 51] John Calvin says of these verses God has made himself our spontaneous debtor he blesses abundantly by sheer promise the undeserved privilege of being his and yes his blessing can only be received humbly by us as a gracious gift in obedient faith and trust but that's the means of us appropriating this sheer privilege of his promise not the grounds upon which we deserve it not ever God could just demand our obedience as our duty he has every right to do so indeed he does demand our obedience but so great is God's generosity and his grace that he encourages us to that obedience by these gratuitous promises of sheer abundant blessing because he is a God who delights to reward his children he is the great rewarder says Hebrews 11 of those who seek him notice that real reward real blessing comes not to those who are seeking only that reward and blessing but to those who seek him verse 2 speaks here about blessings coming upon you and overtaking you you're not looking at them you're not looking for them you're looking to God alone to his voice to obey him to love him to trust him and you find that you're overtaken you're overwhelmed by all these blessings as well

God wants us to seek him he wants us to want him not just to want him because of what we can use him to get for ourselves it's a big difference just as a father who's been away for many weeks on business he wants his kids to run up to him and to hug him and kiss him and love to have him back not just to run straight to his suitcase to see what he might have brought back from that business trip away but if there have been all those phone calls and Skype calls and so on and he's been listening to them saying oh how much we miss you how much we want you home how much we're longing for you and when he gets home abundant things to give to his little ones of course and so it is with the Lord our heavenly father but it is it is our joy in him and his joy in us that is the heart of all that that deepest blessing consists in and that's so clear here and that's the third thing because you see at the heart of these verses is God's purpose and plan in his call of blessing to his people it's what his people should be that they should be as he has called them to be that is the greatest blessing verse 1 says that they will be set high above the nations for the praise of his great glory and you see there in verses 9 and 10 it lies at the very heart of these concentric circles of blessing described in verses 7 to 13 the very apex of God's blessing of his people is that his people will fulfill the calling to be his holy people and to shine his glory in this world so that people will see who they are to whom they belong and will revere them and revere their

God see there's echoes all the way through here of God's promise to Abraham right back at the beginning God called him to bless him with prosperity with progeny with a place with the land with God's presence with God's protection but all of that blessing upon Abraham was for a great plan and purpose that all the peoples of the earth should be blessed by this same God through him so you see this calling to blessing for God's people it was also both personal and prophetic Israel then were called to be God's light to the world and Canaan really was God's kingdom on earth for a time but it was only ever the beginning it was the beachhead if you like of God's invasion into this fallen world to retake its whole territory for the kingdom of heaven that's the plan and the purpose of God's call upon his people that begun with Abraham to bless ultimately all the nations so that the whole earth is filled with the glory of our

God and that day of course is yet to be still lies in the future even for us but these verses are prophetic and they point to the ultimate fulfillment of all God's plan and purpose when all of this that Moses speaks here all of it shall be this world over and the scriptures of what we call the Old Testament all of them are prophetic Jesus says in Matthew 11 all the prophets and the law prophesied until now until John the Baptist came but since then he said the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing in the ministry and the mission of the Lord Jesus himself and isn't it in the Lord Jesus himself that we see most clearly verse 1 here and verses 9 and 10 fulfilled in abundance this is my chosen one said the voice from the glory this is the one in whom I am well

please listen to him and

Jesus himself said I am the light of the world and I when I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself this is fulfilled above all in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ but don't stop there it is the Lord Jesus but not only in the days of his earthly ministry in everything that is still being accomplished and will be accomplished for the glory of his kingdom till the ends of the earth are filled with his glory and every people and every nation are called to join in as part of his kingdom and that's why Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5 don't think that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets as if because I have come God's people's calling has now been abolished never I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them now you will be truly lights to this whole world so let your light shine before the whole world so that they will see you and give glory to our father in heaven along with you see that is that is the blessing that

[29 : 42] Christ now pronounces upon his church in this age of fulfillment that verse 10 here will be realized in God's people the world over that all the people of the earth shall see that you are God's people in Christ and will be in awe of you and will be in awe of your message about me you will be what I have made you if you obey my voice and heed my command says the sovereign Lord and ultimately you see there can be no greater blessing than to become and to be through the call of God's extraordinary grace to become what we were created to be images of God's glory in this whole universe that's why Paul says in Ephesians 3 verse 10 that the calling of God's people is that through the church manifold wisdom of God might be made known not just on earth but among all the powers in the heavenly places and that he says is

God's eternal purpose now being realized through Christ in his people forever you see that is the ultimate zenith of blessing of what it means to be blessed for verses 9 and 10 here to be true of you forever that we should be established as a people to the Lord our God to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect as Jesus puts it walking in his ways as verse 9 says here and verse 10 being known being recognized to be his glorious image throughout this world and that is the call of heaven laid out here and laid out all through the biblical gospel to shine like the son in the kingdom of the father that's what Jesus says we're called to to inherit our true destiny to be to the praise of his glory to be like him there can't be any greater reward for a human being

I think that helps us to understand what the Bible means when it talks about this whole idea of reward and also of loss sometimes we find it hard you see because our minds are so conditioned to thinking about rewards as arbitrary things and as things that are bound up with merit with what we earn if you're a pianist working in an orchestra you're told well do well play your piano well all year in your orchestra and at Christmas you'll get a decent bonus or you say to a child maybe do all your piano practice regularly go to all your lessons and then when your birthday comes you'll get those golf clubs that you really want you see those are arbitrary rewards aren't they there's no real connection with what you do for the reward but here's something quite different do all your piano practice attend all your lessons stick in at learning the piano and your reward will be one day you will be able to play that piano for all the rest of your life with all the joy and the blessing and the delight of making beautiful music because the thing itself has become the reward you see proper real rewards are intrinsic to the activity itself which itself just becomes more and more and more rewarding you see

God himself is the ultimate reward he is the ultimate blessing and the joy of the kingdom is the end result of having become throughout life the kind of person who loves and enjoys God himself through knowing him as he has revealed himself to us in his gospel word and ultimately in his son the Lord Jesus and that reward is fulfilled in being able to be the kind of person who can and who will glorify God and therefore enjoy God forever but that capacity for reward for blessing in ultimate fulfillment that is something that is being forged now in our lives and if we've spent our lives being the kind of people who have not rejoiced in humble surrender to the lordship of God who have not gladly yielded themselves to him then that blessing and that joy simply cannot and will not be possible for us and instead we should be forever what we have become during our lives insistent rejecters of the call of heaven and instead therefore determined recipients of the curse of hell and so you see

God warns us bluntly loudly shockingly but honestly and urgently and compassionately he warns us of the terrible future that will be if verse 15 if you will not obey the voice of the lord your god and do not these verses lay out what we can only describe ultimately as the curse of hell they describe the awful horror of banishment out of God's glorious kingdom as a result of rejecting willfully the grace

that has been proffered by his generous sovereign hand and we've rejected it in haughty disobedient unbelief and you can see the second part of the chapter mirrors the first exactly the curses are summarized in verses 15 to 19 and then expanded from verse 20 to the end but you can't miss can you as we read it that the curses last longer and longer and longer why is that is that because

[35 : 56] God's dark side is greater than his goodness never far from it but it is because our perversity is so much greater than our purity so that God has to shout loudly he has to thrust it so vividly before our faces to show us the danger the disaster that we so easily blunder towards wrong way go back is what these verses shout to us subtle signs are not enough here he thrusts it in our face with unashamed realism God knows the moral power of fear and he uses it repeatedly some Christians today don't like that they say fear is no motivator it's only grace only goodness that can make people change and respond rightly well I'm afraid that's all well and good but the scriptures and God himself totally disagree with you doesn't the lighten him amazing grace with that line it was grace that taught my heart to fear and this chapter is here to make us fear the fear the terrible reversal of his call to heaven which is the dreadful curse of hell and it is just like the first part of the chapter but in reverse so you see in verses 16 to 19 the curse also is pervasive and profound every dimension of life but now it's not blessed it's cursed and then it's hammered home in these awful verses about the horrors of

God's curse as they're built up climax upon climax disease and drought and defeat and sieges and famine and suffering and these great swathes of pictures are interspersed with what Derek Kidner calls intimate touches of terror and pathos verse 32 watching your children taken away as slaves your eyes failing with longing but you're utterly helpless or verse 34 driven mad by the terrors that your eyes are forced to see or verse 53 look at eating your own children so dire is the calamity you face now verse 55 fighting with your family over the flesh of your infants as food and the tenderest most refined woman fighting off her husband and children for a share of her after birth and cannibalistic eating utterly dehumanized and degraded and disgusting and terrible and the sheer unmitigated climax of horror from verse 65 to the end no respite no resting place trembling failing languishing dread night and day dread to the very core of your being that is curse utter curse pervasive and profound and notice second that like the blessing also it is by

God's promise and personally meted out we can't avoid that verse 20 the Lord will send upon you curses and confusion the Lord verse 25 will cause you to be defeated verse 27 the Lord will strike you and on and on it's the Lord it's the Lord who will do all this if he is sovereign in blessing yes but he is also sovereign in meeting out his judgment but notice this while the blessings were freely promised out of his sheer grace notice verse 20 the curse follows transgression and sin as a just and righteous sentence that is fully and completely deserved you will perish on account of the evil of your deeds because you have forsaken me do you see that to scorn God's words God's commands is to scorn and disdain

God himself you have forsaken me it is personal rejection of God himself when you tamper with his words when you blunt his commands when you ignore what he tells you that should strike fear into the heart especially of leaders in the western churches today who so often have tampered and destroyed and reversed God's own words and done it in his name and in the name of the inspiration of his Holy Spirit fear Jesus says he who does not obey my commandments does not love me you have forsaken me and therefore you are cursed and notice also the purpose of God's curse and it is that even in judgment in the negative of his blessing people will still be made to be witnesses to him and to the praise of his glorious justice and righteousness verse 37 says they will be a witness among the peoples but not positively negatively as a byword as a proverb as a horror bearing witness to

God's unchanging faithfulness to his covenant words the same in verse 46 their plight will be a sign and a wonder a mighty statement of God but against them to the world it means what he says more explicitly later on in chapter 29 verse 25 that the world will look at them and their curse and they will say it is because they abandoned the covenant with the Lord the God of their fathers and went and served other gods that's why this has come upon them and so even in their rejection of God's covenant and ultimately of his Christ they will bear witness to the faithfulness of God's righteousness in both his mercy and in his judgment and we might ponder the extent to which that has been true not only as we read through the history of the Bible but as we look back on 20 centuries since the Lord Jesus came to his own and his own received him not is it not true that so

often for 20 centuries the

[43 : 03] Jews have been a horror a byword among the peoples bearing their wrath and bearing testimony in this way and we also as the Christian church today we need to understand that wholesale rejection of the God of truth and of his commands that has happened so greatly in our western world today and has left cities like ours littered with buildings empty that once pointed their steeples to heaven and to the truth of God but now are empty derelict abandoned or turned into something else do they not loudly it is because they have abandoned the gospel of the Lord their God and he has said you have forsaken me and so I have forsaken you you see friends these words with all this curse they're also prophetic they foretell reality the grim reality of what became Israel's history and the horror of judgment and exile and the sheer barbarism the horror that these verses foretell are echoed in what exactly happened read lamentations especially chapter 4 and you'll see they are looking back on this as real tragic terrible history and if you read these sorts of terrible things and you think they're somehow exaggerated I'm afraid that just means that you've sanitized you blinded your mind to what one writer calls the volcano that lies deep within human nature and which can burst into activity all too easily when there's a serious enough shift in circumstances I watched recently a film about the Russian revolution a hundred years ago this year and another one about the doings of the SS in the German Third Reich and nothing that is described in these verses did not happen in these dark and terrible periods of history among people who were until then among the most civilized sophisticated people on this earth these verses are prophetic they foretold historical reality for a time in our earth's history but more than that friends they foretell what will one day be historical reality for this world forever when God's presence and when

God's hand of restraint is forever removed from that volcano that lies at the heart of human nature and when man who has rejected God is cast out utterly from his kingdom of blessing and God's mercy and restraint is removed so that mankind is left to himself forever to live without God free of that restraining mercy and that will be what the Bible calls hell do not take this lightly it's such an easy thing to do I heard that tune of Billy Joel's on the radio this week some say there's heaven for those who await some say it's better but I say it ain't I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints the sinners have much more fun is that is that what you think that hell the place where you're removed forever from every vestige of the life and the light and the blessing that is from God the creator that that could ever be a place of laughter of fun look at verses 65 to the end here no respite no resting place only trembling hearts fading eyes fear dread horror utter terror longing for the day and the night and longing for the night and the day no glorious freedom abject slavery in fact worse than slavery longing to be slaves but no one will even have you as a slave friends do not close your eyes to God's warning sign these words foretell reality eternal reality terrible reality but they do so to foster and to force repentance so that you will not be destroyed that's what Jonah's message to Nineveh was 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed but they understood and they repented and they were saved but so often throughout history God's people did not listen and did not repent the very last chapter of Second Chronicles Israel's history tells us that God persistently sent warnings to them because he had compassion on them but it says they kept mocking his messengers despising his words and scorning his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people until there was no remedy and they were cast out into exile and again centuries later when having brought them back to his land in his great mercy at last he came in the person of his own son and they rejected even him and Jesus told that terrible parable of the vineyard remember for they killed every servant and then the master's son and said these awful words the owner will come and destroy those tenants who killed all his messengers and his son and cast them out and give his vineyard to another friends if you think that we in these last days living in the New

Testament church that we can set aside these warnings of God you need to go and read your New Testament you need to read Acts chapter 5 1st Corinthians 11 about God's judgment on his people you need to read Revelation 2 and 3 about Christ's warnings to his churches of what will happen if they do not repent you need to read the book of Hebrews you need to listen to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as he pronounces those terrible words of curse you need to read them and you need to tremble because yes we live in days of far greater grace greater privilege greater blessing greater everything in these last days but also therefore far far greater responsibility no to take God seriously in all his gospel word in the truly awesomeness of this call of heaven but the terrible

awfulness and the clarity of the curse of hell

[50 : 27] Paul says to Timothy if we endure we shall reign with him but if we deny him he will deny us if we are faithless he will remain faithful faithful to his covenant promise because he cannot deny himself this chapter is prophetic it warns us about a reality to come in order to lead us to repentance before it is too late Jesus and his apostles are even clearer than Moses that there will come a time when if you keep mocking his messengers if you keep scorning his judgment just as ancient Israel did it will be too late only wrath will remain there will be no remedy but the new testament tells us that today the way is still open if you heed the warning wrong way go back and even the symbols of this chapter in front of us tell us the way back because it is a way back to another mountain of curse where just like here on Mount

Ebal the mount of curse God himself came in the person of his own son to become a curse for us to redeem us from the curse so that we need never taste the curse of hell but rather can heed and respond to the call of heaven and find our true destiny in him forever and ever and be overtaken by the abundance of his sheer blessing and joy from the treasure of his heaven that he wants to rain down upon those who are his people these things says the apostle are written for us in these last days so today if you hear his voice don't harden your heart for God says all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you will obey the voice of the Lord your God made known to us at last so wonderfully in the Lord

Jesus Christ do not harden your heart let's pray oh God who declarest thine almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace that we running the way of thy commandments may obtain your gracious promises and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen well we're going to sing as we close number 822 this hymn of Charles Wesley with its plea now Lord move me to repent let me now my sin repent now my proud revolt deplore weep believe and sin no more if I rightly read your heart merciful in every part as before your throne

I bow pardon and accept me now number 822 this hymn yea oh oh Do not parece.