

Loving Obedience: The Fruit of Real Repentance

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, which is in Deuteronomy chapter 11, page 155 in the Visitor's Bibles. And you'll see that we were looking at the long section last week in chapters 9 and 10.

And in a way, really, the first verse of chapter 11, I suppose, could be the rounding off verse of what goes before. Sort of rounds off and repeats the same message and then leads on into this chapter.

Look back to chapter 10, verse 12. And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? To fear him, walk in his ways, love him, and so on. And again, chapter 11, verse 1. And you shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.

And consider today, since I'm not speaking to your children who've not known or seen it, consider the discipline of the Lord your God. His greatness, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm, his signs and his deeds that he did in Egypt to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and to all his land.

And to what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses, their chariots, and how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you. And how the Lord has destroyed them to this day.

[1 : 3 0] And, that is, consider also what he did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place. And what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab and of Reuben.

How the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them in the midst of Israel. For your eyes have seen all the great work of the Lord that he did.

You shall therefore keep the whole commandment that I command you today, that you may be strong and go in and take possession of the land that you're going over to possess. And that you may live long in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their offspring, a land flowing with milk and honey.

For the land that you're entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt from which you've come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it or watered it with your feet.

Like a garden of vegetables. But the land you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven. A land that the Lord your God cares for.

[2 : 4 1] The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if you'll indeed obey my commands that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to serve him with all your heart, with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land and its season.

The early rain and the latter rain. That you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock. And you shall eat and be full.

Take care lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you. And he will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain.

And the land will yield no fruit. And you will perish quickly off the good land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.

And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand that they will be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children. Talking of them when you are sitting in your house, when you are walking by the way, when you lie down, when you rise.

[3 : 48] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. That your days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them. As long as the heavens are above the earth.

For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do. Loving the Lord your God. Walking in all his ways. Holding fast to him. Then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you.

And you'll dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon.

From the river, the river Euphrates, to the western sea. That's the Mediterranean. No one shall be able to stand against you. The Lord your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread as he promised you.

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing if you obey the commandment of the Lord your God which I command you today.

[4 : 53] And the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God. But turn aside from the way I'm commanding you today. To go after other gods that you've not known. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that you're entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road, towards the going down of the sun in the land of the Canaanites, who live in the Araba opposite Gilgal, beside the oak of Moreh? For you are to cross over the Jordan to go in to take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you.

And when you possess it and live in it, you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the rules that I'm setting before you today. Amen.

And may God bless his word to us. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 11, page 155, if you have a church visitor's Bible.

The call of the Christian gospel is not something to be discussed, debated. It's something to be done. It's not something to be observed in a sort of detached way.

[6 : 20] It's something to be obeyed in a deeply personal way. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance and do not presume. It was John the Baptist's call at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Follow me, says Jesus, and don't call me Lord and not do what I tell you. Pretty clear. It's through obedience to the truth, says the Apostle Peter, that we are born again through the living and abiding word, which remains forever.

And that is what real repentance and faith means. And it's always been so. We saw last time that Deuteronomy chapter 9 and 10 gives us a vivid description, doesn't it, of that real penitent faith, a circumcision of heart.

Verse 16 of chapter 10, And circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. A cutting right to the heart to cut away our rebelliousness and yield to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yield to God, the one who is the Lord of earth and heaven and everything in it. And in chapter 11 here, you see, Moses continues to describe for us what that will really look like in people in whom there is the real fruit of real repentance, wholehearted, loving obedience to the great Redeemer, the one who is the ruler, indeed, of the whole wide world.

[7 : 53] But there is a choice. And this chapter hammers that choice home to us. Look at verse 26. See, I'm setting before you today a blessing and a curse.

Just because God is the sovereign, absolute ruler of all things and all people, that means that He cannot be trifled with. His commands cannot be treated lightly.

Far less can they be despised or ignored. No, we bow to Him in loving loyalty to His command and His rule. And that is the way to life.

And the only way to life, it is the way to blessing. It is the way to lifelong enjoyment, indeed, of God's great blessings. But to refuse His command is to forfeit all of that.

It's to insist on all the horror that is contained in that dreadful word curse. The one is the way of penitence that leads to our true destiny.

[8 : 59] The other is the way of presumption. And that can lead only to disaster. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance and do not presume.

And Moses' words to Israel in this chapter help us to heed that challenge from John the Baptist by showing us what loving obedience that is the fruit of real repentance, what it looks like in real day-to-day life in terms of our attitudes, in terms of our actions, the things that flow out of truly circumcised hearts, hearts that have been touched, changed by the grace of God in Christ.

And the first thing, if you look at verses 2 to 7, the first thing in people that really do love the Lord, who keep His charge, who keep His statutes, His commands, in other words, people who are genuine believers, the first thing that this shows us is that there will be people who examine and who truly perceive the discipline of the Lord our God.

Verse 2, consider, that is, know, understand, perceive the reality of the discipline of the Lord your God. You'll see the footnote there, that word discipline could be translated instruction.

It's a word that's used repeatedly throughout the Proverbs. A book about the way of wisdom that begins, doesn't it, with the fear of the Lord, with reverence of God. By being instructed truly by God, my son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of His reproof, Proverbs 3.11.

[10 : 32] It's translated in various ways. Teaching, instruction, chastisement, correction, warning, rebuke, even. And that just helps us to see, doesn't it, however we translate it, it is a weighty and serious word, not a trivial one.

True instruction from God and about God leads us to revere Him, leads us to take Him very, very seriously. And that's Moses' point here, isn't it? Examine, truly perceive what your own history with His God teaches you about how you should truly take His words, how you should treat His command to you to obey Him.

Love and obey Him because of what you know, because of what you've seen with your own eyes. Look at verse 2, you've seen His great and mighty hand outstretched on your behalf, haven't you?

Why on earth would you ever want that great and mighty hand stretched out against you? And He gives examples for them to ponder. First of all, this wonderfully positive one of God's hand outstretched for them to rescue them from Egypt, from the king Pharaoh.

Verse 4. And that happened, didn't it, through God's judgment on His enemies. Now consider that, says the Lord, and consider which side it was good to be on.

[11 : 56] And consider verse 5, everything that God has done for you all these years in the wilderness until you came to this place today, this moment of destiny, all that He has done to preserve you, to bless you.

Consider that. We had a summary of all of that back in chapters 1 to 3 of Deuteronomy, didn't we? But just listen to some words from Psalm 78, a great psalm that tells the history of God's people.

He divided the sea and let them pass through it. He made the waters stand in a heap beside them. In the daytime He led them with a great light, in the night with a fiery light.

He split rocks in the wilderness to give them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers, abundant blessing.

Yet, they still sinned more against Him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert. That they tested God in their hearts. They spoke against God. Can God provide a table in the wilderness?

[12 : 58] Can God really give meat and bread for us? Therefore, when the Lord heard, He was full of wrath. His anger rose against Israel because they did not believe in God.

They didn't trust in His saving power. And on and on it goes. He blessed them. He preserved them. And yet, so often, they rebelled. And so, this God, who remember in chapter 10, verse 17, we're reminded, is without partiality.

He takes no bribe. This God cannot be presumed upon like that. And many times, He had to bring judgment upon His own people because of their sin.

Consider that, says Moses. And be deep and real in your repentance. Not superficial. That is presumption. And examine your own history.

And understand, consider, the reality of God's discipline. Not least, verse 6 there, you see that terrible incident with Dathan and Abiram and Korah.

[14 : 03] You'll read about it in Numbers chapter 16 where they rebelled against the authority of God, against His word through Moses and Aaron. Look and learn, he says, don't fail to take God's word seriously.

You read the story. As it says here, the earth opened up and swallowed these men and everyone with them because they challenged the authority of God's word and His command to them through Moses. And by the way, in the New Testament, the Apostle Jude refers to that story.

And he calls those who are perverting the truth of God in the New Testament era, perverting the truth of God into sensuality, he calls them people just like that. And he says, for them, utter darkness has been reserved forever.

That ought to be a terrifying word, oughtn't it, to those who are trying to pervert the grace of God today into sensuality, into a license for perverted sexuality. That is happening in the Western church all over the place today.

And Moses would say, as Jesus says, as Paul says, as Jude says, look and learn. Don't think that just professing to be my people means anything at all if you don't hear and heed my commands.

[15 : 18] Don't presume upon God. Don't think that you can do that by ignoring His authority on earth. Whether in Moses' day, it's Moses as God's appointed spokesman, or whether it's in our day and it's His apostles who, as Edward was telling us last Sunday evening from 2 Peter 3, it is through them that we receive the command of our Lord and Savior.

That is a real warning, isn't it, to those who want to revise what the Bible really means today and say, oh, the apostles, we don't need to listen to them. They didn't understand. But it is also a real warning to those who might pride themselves on their own theological soundness and orthodoxy.

Don't you presume either, says the Lord. Don't presume on your orthodoxy, when you are very reformed and evangelical understanding of God's sovereign election and salvation. No, no, no.

It is not God's sovereign election, per se, that saves us. It is election to holiness. The call of God must bear fruit in real penitent faith.

It must bear fruit for holiness, says the apostle in Hebrews, because without that no one will see the Lord. God. The New Testament is absolutely clear about that. Yes, Paul says to Titus, he saves us not by works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

[16 : 46] Titus 3, verse 5. But he goes right on, doesn't he? To insist that those who have believed must devote themselves to good. He redeemed us, he says, from lawlessness to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

It's the same in Ephesians. We are created, he says, in Christ Jesus for good works, which God himself prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. And the whole of the second half of Ephesians urges us to walk in a manner worthy of your calling by God.

And so you see, the doctrine of election, the doctrine of predestination does offer great assurance for those who are truly humbly penitent, who look to God alone for his mercy to save us, who repent and follow him.

But that doctrine can never ever give any assurance whatsoever to those who are presumptuous. Don't presume to say, we have Abraham as our father, we are of the elect of God. No, bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

That's why our Westminster Confession of Faith is absolutely right when it says that the doctrine of God's sovereign choice in salvation should afford matter of praise and reverence and admiration of God and of humility and diligence and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the gospel.

[18 : 27] No assurance for those who disregard and disobey. People of real faith examine and truly perceive the discipline of the Lord our God.

They take him seriously. They heed his warnings, his rebuke, his chastisement and they humble themselves before him. And it's worth us this morning, isn't it, asking ourselves that question, is that me?

Do I consider my own life even recognizing what God has had to deal with me, to chastise me, to rebuke me with discipline in order to help me to repent?

Am I doing that or am I really still resenting it? Am I resisting it? Am I humbling myself under God's mighty hand?

That's how real love to God manifests itself. And we need to be real about that. But secondly, Moses shows us here that those who really love and obey the Lord our God will be people who enjoy and who truly possess the inheritance of the Lord our God.

[19 : 39] You can see it's the enjoyment, it's the possession of the land that is the chief focus here in verses 8 to 17 and again in verses 21 to 25. Salvation is something to be enjoyed and possessed more and more and more according to the Bible.

That's what it says here, that's what it says everywhere. We're to discover how wonderful, how satisfying it really is when we trust and obey because as we sang there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

And we tend to focus a lot don't we on the cost and what we have to leave behind and give up to follow our covenant Lord. But the Bible constantly also sets before us the great gain. And that far outweighs any loss at all.

That's what this section does for us in abundance here. It's showing God's people the abundance, the blessing, the richness, the joy that can come to them.

And verse 12 says, because you're going into a land that God himself cares for. His eyes are always upon it. Now again, notice it's a land of promise verse 9.

[20 : 52] It's a sworn land by God's grace, by his mercy given to the patriarchs and to their offspring. It's a gift of God's grace but it is to be enjoyed and possessed through obedience.

Look at verse 8. Through loyalty to the covenant God so that you will be strong and possessed. So that you will live long in the land. Verse 21, so that your children and their days will be multiplied in the land.

And again, verse 22, it's through obedience, isn't it? That's how verse 23 comes about. That's how the Lord will drive out the nations and extend your territory from the wilderness to Lebanon, right to the great sea.

You see, that is because blessing in life, real blessing, comes from God's gracious hand, not from our slogging feet. The footnote there in verse 10 about irrigation literally is, it's a land, Egypt, watered by your feet.

It's probably referring to the great long trenches for irrigation that they had to dig into the desert from the river Nile. Back-breaking work. But the promised land, we're told, is to be very, very different.

[22 : 04] It's going to be watered by rain, by rain from heaven, drinking in the rain from heaven. That's a geographical fact. It's a land of hills and valleys. It's different from Egypt. But it's also a great theological truth that's being spoken here.

It harks back, doesn't it, to Genesis chapter 2, to the Garden of Eden. Do you remember God himself planted a garden where he would be? And he watered it with springs from the earth, and a river ran through it.

And what Israel is being told is, this land is the beachhead of the New Eden. This is where God's blessing is going to be shown.

This is where the curse, which you remember was the working of the ground by the sweat of your brow. It's where it's being pushed back through the blessing and the promise of God. It's where God's people are getting a preview, if you like, of what this whole world is going to be like one day.

And yes, the blessings are expressed in physical terms. There's no doubt about that. But it's a mistake. It's a mistake to see what is promised here as merely material prosperity.

[23 : 12] It's not. Sometimes people say, oh, in the Old Testament, God's blessings were physical and material. And in the New Testament, it's different. They're spiritual blessings. But if you read the Old Testament, that's just not so.

It's much more complex than that. Read Proverbs, read Ecclesiastes, read Job. There's cries of mystery, cries of agony, aren't there? Because it seems so often that the material blessings go indeed to the wicked.

And the godly are the ones who suffer lack. And that's just telling us, isn't it, that true prosperity is always more than merely about material things even then.

And even in this chapter here, the language is not just merely that of material abundance. It's speaking, isn't it, about the fulfillment of God's covenant promises, the great spiritual promises that he gave to Abraham.

Speaking of the restoring of this earth. Verse 21 there speaks, doesn't it, of covenant blessings being fulfilled, the seed of faith multiplying greatly.

[24 : 18] So does verses 24 and 25. It's talking about the land of God's promise being extended to the full boundaries of the promised land. And Jesus himself, doesn't he, he promises us living in this age, this age when the life of the new world is breaking into this earth in every place because of his resurrection and his glory and is being extended now to the whole of this earth.

He says that we too as his people will experience real tangible blessings even here and now in this life. If we wholeheartedly trust him and obey him and follow him.

Do you remember Peter asks Jesus in Mark chapter 10 and says, Lord, we've left everything to follow you. What will there be for us? And Jesus says, yes, no one who has left all these things for my sake in the gospel will not receive a hundredfold now in this time.

Houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, lands with persecutions and in the life to come, eternal life. Yes, persecutions because the world hated him and will hate us also.

but also great, great blessings real and present to enjoy. And the true richness of life that he is speaking about is the life that can only truly be known inside the kingdom of God where God's eyes are constantly on his people, where his blessings are rained down from heaven.

[25 : 52] And we share so much in the way of brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and homes and lands just through knowing life as it's truly meant to be, bound together as the people of God, life in his presence among his people, enjoying his blessings.

What is the real richness in human life even now in this world? It's in relationships, isn't it? The poorest person in the world is the one who has no friends, no family, no one to love, no one to love them.

And you can be as rich as Croesus and be utterly poor, can't you? In fact, you can be utterly dissatisfied with all your material possessions and poor, poor, poor, because you have none of that that really is richness.

And yet you can have so much less and have a life that is truly rich, full of joy, full of sheer enjoyment, in the bonds that you can have with so many of the Lord's people all over the world.

It's one of the wonderful things, isn't it, about being a son or daughter of our Heavenly Father. Wherever you go in this world, you will find brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers to help you, to love you, to serve alongside you, to bless you.

[27 : 04] That's true, isn't it? You see, if you're a believer who is really gripped with the gospel of Christ, if you're really living out that life of true repentance, you will be someone who is enjoying true prosperity even now, enjoying that inheritance of the Lord our God, that foretaste of the world to come.

And your life will be full of refreshment, of fertility, of blessings, the things that can come only from heaven, never from the trudging through this earth of our own.

And if you are that, then your life will be a wonderful beacon to all this world round about, won't it? Showing them what it means to share in the glorious kingdom of God. Because it'll be such a contrast to the world all round about us, which is full of people trudging along, digging those furrows, seeking satisfaction only from the relentless labor of their own hands and their own feet, but not the blessings that come only from looking to the God of heaven.

I can think of one very comfortably off retiree that I know whose life is increasingly poor in terms of human relationships. And they don't even enjoy their wealth.

They constantly fret about it and worry about it all the time. I can think of another, a godly Christian widow whose health is much poorer, who is much less well-off material.

[28 : 34] Even what she does have, she gives so much of it away to others. But even though she's in her 80s, the sheer breadth of her interest, her contact with people all around the world, it just fills her life with riches.

and she is blessed and she blesses many, many others. Her life truly is a life that drinks in the rain from heaven and flows out in living waters to other people.

And she's happy and joyful. But you see, the clear lesson of this section is that that life of contentment, that life of richness, of abundant enjoyment, will not come from the gods of this age.

Look at verse 16. It won't come from the Baals, from the Ashteras, that this is referring to the gods of ancient Canaan. And it will not come from the gods that we look to today, the material gods that we seek and chase to find fulfillment.

In that way, God says, lies poverty and disaster. And that's how the story of Israel unfold. Read on into the book of Kings. Read the story of Elijah.

[29 : 45] What happened? The disobedience of God's people and their king led to the rain of heaven being absolutely shut off and parched dryness in the land. Ultimately, of course, they were evicted completely from the enjoyment of the land because of their sins in the horror of exile, the curse of exile.

And doesn't the Lord Jesus teach us precisely the same thing? Liberation and joy, he says, comes not from seeking after these things that the pagans seek, slogging away with your feet.

Don't seek after these things that way, he says. Seek the kingdom of God. Seek the treasure that will never fade, the riches that will never be stolen away from you.

There's a lot of Christians, you know, and maybe you're one of them, a lot of Christians who are very driven people in their lives, slogging relentlessly, sowing and irrigating, seeking the gain from the work of their own hands.

Friends, God's call to us is to be liberated out of that land of Egypt. He wants you to enjoy life, he wants you to have life in all its fullness, life lived under his constant eye, life lived receiving his constant blessings by faith and in trust.

[31 : 06] He wants us to be people who drink in the refreshing water of heaven from his good hand. Why would we want to resist that? Derek Kidner says, of verse 12, it's to the self-willed that the promise here of verse 12 seems like an intrusion, having God's eyes on us all the time.

And it sees verse 16, the plea not to turn to other gods as an unfair pressure. But Moses, he says, speaks as a lover of God.

And he calls his hearers to that same commitment to this loving and abundantly blessing God. And people of real faith, you see, know that the key that unlocks the door to real enjoyment of life, real fulfillment of our purpose, is the glad surrender of loving obedience to him.

And they know that in his service is perfect freedom. they know that to know him is to know life in all its abundance, life as it was meant to be.

And that's why, you see, also there will be people who grasp the urgent need to keep the truth of God's will and the truth of his word right at the very heart of their family life and, indeed, their community life.

[32 : 29] And the fruit of real repentance, you see, is seen in people, thirdly, look, who embrace and who truly preserve the will of the Lord our God. Look at verses 18 to 23.

Lay up these words of mine in your heart and your soul. Bind them as a sign on your hands, as frontlets between your eyes. In other words, embrace, absorb the will of God in every aspect of your thinking and your doing.

Let it be part of the warp and woof of your very life. But in order to do so, God's word has to be preserved and taught. And that's the emphasis here on writing it and teaching.

Write it on your doorposts, he says, verse 20. In other words, write it into your family life day by day. So that, verse 22, you can be walking in all his ways.

We need God's word written and taught so that it can be part of our lives and we can walk in his ways. Now, don't be silly about this. Notice that there's nothing literalistic about this.

[33 : 34] We saw it already in chapter 6 where Moses says the same thing. He was not telling them literally to make boxes and put copies of the law in it and stick them on their heads and their hands and walk about as though that would make them holy.

That's not what he's saying. It's absurd to be literalistic like that. What he's saying is he wants his words to be in their heads and in their hearts and in their thoughts and in the actions of their hands everything that they do.

Proverbs 3 verse 3 says let his covenant love and faithfulness never forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them in your hearts. Make them part of you.

That's what it means. It's just foolish literalism that could think anything else. God's word must be heard, written, spoken, digested, become part of us.

Nothing literalistic about this. Nor is there anything legalistic about it. Again, remember chapter 6. When your son or your daughter says to you, why are we to do this?

[34 : 34] Why do we obey this command? You're to say to them, because we are a people redeemed by the Lord our God. He rescued us out of bondage. He's leading us in the way of blessing.

He knows the way to bless us in life. And we trust him and we will follow our good shepherd. Nothing literalistic and nothing legalistic, but nevertheless, it is something very real, isn't it?

There's no middle way here. It's a must for every household of faith, he says, so that this is lived out in reality. God's word is given.

It's written clearly, verse 22, all this commandment that I command you today, to be truly lived out, to be taught, to be passed on. And it needs to be in your heart and soul.

It needs to be visible in your life. In the work of your hands. Otherwise, it will be just hypocrisy, won't it? And that will be exposed. Hypocrisy is always exposed.

[35 : 35] And one of the great exposures of hypocrisy is our children. They see, don't they, when we say one thing and do another. We can't dodge responsibility for our children if we take these words seriously.

Parents, listen. Fathers, listen. God will hold us to account for what we teach our children and for the example that we show our children.

I mean, it's obvious, isn't it? Just look in the world around. If you don't teach your children how to eat properly, if you don't teach them how to exercise properly, if you don't teach them how to behave, they will end up in disaster physically, socially, in all sorts of ways.

How much more important is it to teach them the things that are of eternal significance? how much more serious to neglect teaching the way of everlasting life, by neglecting our prayers, by neglecting our teaching, by neglecting our true example to them.

And we're all failures, aren't we, as parents? We're all failures as fathers. I know, personally. But we need at least to be as faithful as we can in helping one another to live this out visibly, really, tangibly in our own homes and in our church fellowship together.

[36 : 54] Because if we don't, verse 21, look, we will be diminishing the spiritual future for our children. And the same must also be true in the church family, mustn't it?

We must embrace the true will of God, preserve it, teach it everywhere in the church. To the spiritual infants, to those who are coming to faith and beginning to understand, so that their future will be preserved, so the gospel will be preserved, so the church will be preserved.

Why is the church in the West today in such terrible decline? It's because, isn't it, the words of God have been erased from the doorposts of the churches. We've sought the world's approval, we've sought to please and appease the world.

So we rub it all off and say, no, no nasty commands here that you don't like. And what does the world do? It walks past and ignores. But look at verses 22 and 23 here.

What is it that gives the church real power, spiritual power, in the midst of a pagan culture, a hostile culture, to really prevail, to really conquer, to really grow and thrive?

[38 : 04] not assimilation to the culture, trying to please the unbelieving pagan world, but fidelity to the one true and living God.

Hold fast to Him and He will overcome for you every tribe, every obstacle, every enemy. Friends, that is a lesson we need to learn and keep relearning in this Western world of ours today.

And that makes the last part here, verses 26 to 32, all the more pertinent. The mark, you see, of people's faith that is real, the mark of the fruit of real obedient repentance will be seen in a people who are unafraid to enact and to truly publicize the seriousness of the gospel call of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at these verses. It's the first mention, isn't it, of the blessings and the curse. You'll see it taken up much more in chapter 27 and 28. But here you see Moses sums up his great call to respond in loving obedience.

And he puts before the people both a really present personal choice but also a perpetual public responsibility.

[39 : 22] Verse 26, See I set before you today a blessing and a curse. That's simply the reality of the biblical gospel. There is no middle way. It's blessing or curse. It's life or death.

It's heaven or hell. It's that serious, says Moses. And you must respond today personally. You must hold fast to the blessing and flee from the curse in a separation that is as real as that great gulf between these two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, 3,000 feet up above the plains.

And he presses on them. As every real preacher must, a real urgent personal choice. You must enact this in your life.

You must trust and obey today. You must repent. You must bear fruit in keeping with repentance. You must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Christ today or else that blessing cannot be yours.

But Moses also presses upon all the people the responsibility, doesn't he, to keep the clarity, that ultimate seriousness of God's call before them always, not just today.

[40 : 34] Verse 29, and when you come into the land, you will set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. That is to publicly proclaim it to all the people in all the land, perpetually, never to be forgotten.

You read the detail in chapter 27, you'll see that they were to plaster great stones and to write the words of this covenant on them very plainly. They were to plant God's gospel word permanently in that land and proclaim it to all the land always.

Which is, of course, now the responsibility Christ has placed into the hands of his church. For every land in the world, go into all the world and proclaim the gospel and make disciples, teaching them, commanding them to obey everything that I've commanded you.

And the church of Jesus Christ, Paul says to Timothy, is to be that pillar and buttress of truth in all the world until the Lord Jesus comes. Preserving the clarity, the seriousness of God's call for everyone to see and to hear until the end of this age.

And how vividly these verses give give that clarity and depict that message of a great gulf between heaven and hell, life and death, blessing and curse. The very geography proclaims it so vividly, doesn't it?

[42 : 01] As does the history. Look at verse 30. Where was all this to happen? At this place, by the oak of Moreh. Well, if you read back to Genesis chapter 12, you'll see that is the very place that God promised Abraham and said, not for these Canaanites, but for your seed will belong this land.

And let me tell you that for 400 years, every Canaanite in the land laughed and scoffed at the very thought of such a preposterous promise. And no doubt many in Israel thought the same. When is that ever going to happen?

Well, they would not be scoffing much longer as they saw God's promise fulfilled and his people received that land. What is the message? Take the word of this God very, very seriously.

What he says will come to pass, no matter how long it might seem to you. Both in blessing and in curse. A powerful public reminder, a memorial set on a hill of both the infinite mercy, the grace of God, the kindness of God, promising blessing, a future, victory, fulfillment of his promises.

But also reminding of the terrible reality of a curse upon sin and rebellion that rejects his grace, that spurns his covenant call.

[43 : 27] Friends, isn't our responsibility exactly the same today? Mustn't we publicize truthfully and honestly to all the world as a city set on a hill, as a light to the world, as Jesus says, the seriousness of his call to obedience?

Which is a call with no middle way. It is life and death, blessing and curse, heaven and hell. Isn't that our responsibility? We're people of real faith.

Whether there is hatred and resentment, whether the message is scorned and scoffed at, whether we are hated and resented and scorned and scoffed at. But isn't it also a wonderful, wonderful privilege, to declare the good news that there need not be that curse.

There need not be death and hell. But there can be the blessing of life, of heaven itself. Because you see, these two hills, with all their solemnity, with all their truth, they point us, don't they?

They point us forward to another hill, not so very far away from these hills. Where that mount of awful curse became also the mountain of infinite blessing, the hill of Calvary, the mount of crucifixion, where the curse of God and the blessing of God came together, where his wrath and where his mercy met in the person of our great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his own body on the tree.

[45 : 00] Where he, the Son of God, Paul says, became a curse for us, so that the blessing of Abraham might come to us.

And where the mountain that was for him, the place of utter cursed forsakenness, everything Ebal promised, so that that same mountain might become for us, everything that Gerizim promised, the blessing of future, grace, mercy, in the hands of God.

That was the message, wasn't it, that the apostles of Jesus Christ took to the world, not just to the Jew first, but also to the Gentiles. We are Christ's ambassadors, he said. God is making his appeal through us.

It's the same gospel he spoke through Moses, but now it's all the more urgent and we implore you, be reconciled to God today on behalf of Christ. We implore you. For our sake, God made him who had no sin to be sin, so that we might through him become the righteousness of God.

He bore the curse so that you might find the blessings that are truly his. Today, they're saying, you must choose blessing or curse, life or death, heaven and hell.

[46 : 18] We implore you, choose life, choose Christ, seize his cross. Don't scorn his cross. If you do, you trample underfoot not only the salvation of God, but the Son of God himself who loved you.

To do that, says the apostle, is to call down upon yourself the curse, the most terrible, unimaginable curse that is irreversible, that is everlasting.

Friends, it's that serious. Christians and churches that show the fruit of real repentance, that are obeying lovingly their own Lord, they must not only make that real in their own lives personally, but we must perpetually, constantly, publicly proclaim that message to all the world in the sight of all.

The absolute seriousness, the weight, and the wonder, that is the true message of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the mountain of curse and blessing come together through his great and everlasting mercy.

So may God help us to have the courage to lift high the cross of Christ that speaks of grace and mercy, of blessing, but also of curse.

[47 : 52] as long as we live in obedience to our great Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how vividly we see in this picture the truth of your eternal gospel, and how gladly we bow in humble submission at the foot of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

give us grace, we pray, to receive this, his inestimable benefit, and daily ourselves to follow in his blessed steps, and proclaiming his blessed gospel.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.