

Cherishing the Breath of Life: 1. Balanced Justice - in a world of mistakes and malice

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[0 : 00] Well, now we're continuing in our series in the book of Deuteronomy, and we look forward to Willie's sermon a little bit later in the service. So let's turn to Deuteronomy chapter 19, which is the chapter for today.

You'll find that on page 162 in our big hardback church Bibles. Deuteronomy chapter 19. We have various laws here, laws concerning cities of refuge, property boundaries, and witnesses in a judicial situation.

So Moses speaks, and he speaks the word of the Lord. Deuteronomy chapter 19, verse 1. When the Lord your God cuts off the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you, and you dispossess them, and dwell in their cities and in their houses, you shall set apart three cities for yourselves in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

You shall measure the distances and divide into three parts the area of the land that the Lord your God gives you as a possession, so that any manslayer can flee to them.

This is the provision for the manslayer who, by fleeing there, may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally, without having hated him in the past, as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies, he may flee to one of these cities and live, lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him because the way is long and strike him fatally, though the man did not deserve to die since he had not hated his neighbor in the past.

[1 : 51] Therefore, I command you, you shall set apart three cities. And if the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he has sworn to your fathers, and gives you all the land that he promised to give to your fathers, provided you are careful to keep all this commandment, which I command you today by loving the Lord your God and by walking ever in his ways, then you shall add three other cities to these three, lest innocent blood be shed in your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, and so the guilt of bloodshed be upon you.

But if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and he flees into one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and hand him over to the avenger of blood so that he may die.

Your eyes shall not pity him, but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel so that it may be well with you. You shall not move your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set in the inheritance that you will hold in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days.

[3 : 29] The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eyes shall not pity.

It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us today.

Well, do take up your Bibles, page, what is it? 162, if you have one of the church Bibles. How am I? Well, the God of the Bible is the God of life.

The Bible story begins, doesn't it, in Genesis chapter 1 with God giving life to all creation. And God breathes his own life into man to make man a living being out of the dust from which he's made.

[4 : 34] And at the center of that dwelling place of God, the living God with man, is the tree of life, which symbolizes the life-giving nature of our God.

Of course, the tragedy of man's rebellion is to bring the reversal of life, the curse of death, both physical and spiritual estrangement from God.

And that's why, of course, the triumphant finale of the Bible is what we find in Revelation chapter 21 and 22, where there has been the reversal of that curse of death, and the world of life has been restored.

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and death shall be no more. Death has been swallowed up in victory, as the apostle puts it, because God is the God of life.

And so all through the Bible, we see God redeeming life, renewing life, restoring life. The psalmist prays, the Lord, the upholder of my life. And he magnifies Zion, God's dwelling, where he says he has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

[5 : 43] Proverbs tells us that the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. And of course, the apostle Paul declares, doesn't he, that although the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because as Jesus himself said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. God is the Lord of life. And so we shouldn't be surprised, way back at the beginning of God's dealing with Israel, and their entry to the promised land, that beachhead of the eternal kingdom of God here on earth.

We shouldn't be surprised that the Lord is repeatedly insisting that his people grasp that his land, the promised land, is the land of life, the home of life.

Because it's where he, the life-giving God, dwells in the midst of his people. Remember at the end of Deuteronomy, the Lord is life. The Lord is your life and your length of days, says Moses.

And so the Lord's land is to be the arena of life. It must be polluted by violation of life. And life in it must be dignified.

[6 : 49] It must be sanctified and kept sacred. But of course, as we know, and as we've already seen, we're not yet anywhere near the end of God's story.

We're right at the beginning of his great reversal of death, his great redemption in the world. And so even if Israel was to have the right leadership that we were looking at last week in chapter 18, good kings, right judges, faithful Levites and priests and prophets speaking God's words, even still, things will go wrong in a fallen world.

My goodness, don't we know that that is the case? And death does happen by mistake and also by murder, as chapter 19 here deals with.

And death happens in warfare, as chapter 20 deals with. And in various difficult, distressing situations, of human life, as chapter 21 of Deuteronomy deals with. And even, in fact, in the humdrum domestic matters of ordinary life, like looking after livestock and building your house with the right kind of roof, as we see in chapter 22.

And so the sixth commandment, you shall not kill, which is better translated, really, you shall not murder or kill through carelessness or negligence, it needs careful and nuanced consideration and application if God's concern for justice and righteousness is to prevail in this whole arena of protecting and preserving human life.

[8 : 16] That is exactly what these whole chapters do in this section from chapter 19 through most of chapter 22. It's all about cherishing the breath of life. And therefore, its concern is dignity and reverence and justice in all different circumstances of life and death.

So these chapters, they tease out for us and they actually apply for us with great discrimination, with great care. What the sixth commandment of God implies for various different areas of life shows us how we're to think about these things so that we can make sure that the life that God has given, especially to human beings, is never cheapened.

and it's always given the dignity, the honor that is due it because it is life that is made in the image of God himself. And we'll see once again as we've already seen that the Old Testament law is not at all primitive.

It's not at all crude. In fact, it is very sophisticated. It's very precise. It's very careful. It's very balanced. And it therefore has a very great deal to teach the world today, not least in our society at large because of course Israel does serve as a paradigm for a good society, a right, a justly ordered society for any place in the world.

But of course, the church above all is called, isn't it, to be a light to the world today, to be a beacon of truth and of justice, to show the world what true human flourishing must look like.

[9 : 51] So there's a very great deal for us to learn here in a chapter like this. So let's look then at chapter 19, which is all about balanced justice in a world full of mistakes and alas, also often of malice.

And I think we see three very plain lessons here. Life always matters to God and therefore, secondly, lies always matter to God and also, though we'll have to consider why this is so important, landmarks also matter greatly to God.

So verses 1 to 13, first of all, tell us that life always matters to God. These verses speak about reverence for life that is expressed in protecting innocent life and in punishing all blood guilt.

There is to be among God's people sanctuary and mercy for those who have made mistakes, but that does not mean softness and muddle in dealing with those who are malicious.

That's the point of these cities of refuge that are provided here and mentioned in verse 2. You'll remember that they are in addition to the three cities already mentioned back in chapter 4 in the territory to the east of the Jordan.

[11 : 03] So that throughout the whole land there were to be six cities to serve the land. Although, as we read in verse 9, if Israel's territory was to expand fully to the area promised to Abraham, then they would need to have more cities as well.

You can read more detail, perhaps you did, during the offering in Numbers chapter 35 and also in Joshua chapter 20 where it was implemented, but what we have in our chapter is a summary really and a reminder of the key point of it all.

Look at verse 4. It was provision for unintentional and accidental killing, such as this genuine accident with an axe head so that somebody who killed somebody accidentally like that could flee and find sanctuary before he was subject to summary justice without any opportunity to explain himself or the circumstances.

Again, Numbers 35 gives a lot more detail and it also makes it very clear that this was a provision only for accidental death, absolutely not for premeditated murder.

But the reason it was necessary is there in verse 10. You see, lest innocent blood be shed in your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance so that blood guilt will be upon you.

[12 : 22] Because God's land is a place of life. It must not be polluted ever by innocent blood. But you see, this chapter tells us there are two kinds of innocent blood.

There's the innocent victim of a murder. That's what you see in verses 11 to 13, a malicious killing. But there's also the innocent blood of an accidental killer as here in verse 4.

Somebody who must therefore be given sanctuary and mercy unless, if he's not, he might fall victim to unjust revenge as is described in verse 6 by the avenger of blood.

That was the God-appointed means of a family protector whose duty was to administer justice, to protect the lives of the family. But of course, he was a human being. And so as verse 6 says, he might well act in hot anger.

We often do. Without due investigation. And that might lead to a revenge killing that was far from just. Somebody was killed who did not deserve to die. Now that's very common, isn't it?

[13 : 25] Whenever there's a terrible outrage, there is great public anger. And what happens? There's huge pressure, isn't there, on the police, huge pressure on the government to act, to do something, to change a law, to do something, to have revenge.

And as we know in society, very often, those are the very occasions where unjust convictions are made. Or when people take it into their own hand and they wreak vengeance in a wrong-headed fashion.

But no, says the Lord, there must be no business of that. There must be proper checks, proper balances, proper inquiry. You have to look into the circumstances and to the motive behind the thing that has happened.

It may well have been accidental manslaughter as here in verse 4. Or of course, it may have been murder with malice of forethought as verse 11 describes. And the point is very clear.

Innocence must not be punished, but guilt must be punished. You see, verse 10, look at it. It says that to inflict capital punishment on someone wrongly for an unintentional killing, that makes you as guilty of shedding innocent blood as a murderer.

[14 : 40] And verse 13 also tells us that equally to pity and to not punish one who really has committed murder, that also is to be guilty along with the murder of shedding the blood of the innocent.

Punishing wrongly incurs guilt, but not properly punishing murder, that also makes you guilty before God. And if you read Numbers 35, you'll see that that is drummed home repeatedly, isn't it?

The murderer must be put to death. You shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer. He shall be put to death. No atonement may be made for the land for bloodshed in it except by the blood of the one who shed it.

Absolutely no sentimentality, no softness, no muddle when the crime is clear. There can be no sanctuary and no mercy if that is the case.

Because blood guilt pollutes the land of God which is the land of life. And because human beings, human life matters to God always.

[15 : 43] But notice here very importantly shedding innocent blood is not the same as shedding guilty blood. According to God the former must never be done or you'll be guilty before him.

but the latter must likewise not be shirked. Otherwise you will also be guilty before him just like the murderer himself. Well I wonder what you think about that.

In our western society today of course we've moved a very long way from that standard. And if we're to believe the Bible that is not because we are more merciful and because we exalt the virtue of sanctuary but actually it's because we become more muddled and we've exalted sentimentality over true justice.

So much so that we have obliterated this distinction this key distinction between innocent blood the life that must be cherished and protected and guilty blood the life destroying life that must be forfeited.

So what we do in our western society today is we exalt and we protect the human rights of criminals even of murdering terrorists whose main aim is to maim and to kill.

[16 : 55] But we scorn the human rights of innocent unborn babies whom we as a society maim and kill. So the abolition of capital punishment for murder and the availability of free abortion are the hallmarks of civilized society today.

Is that not so? Now of course the death penalty today is a difficult topic an emotive topic. And we have to be very careful and we have to be very realistic as in fact the Bible itself is even in a chapter like this.

There are very serious issues to consider. But what seems clear is that Christians who take the Bible seriously cannot argue as liberals do as secularists do even as some church leaders even the Pope does that capital punishment is intrinsically morally wrong that it demeans life in itself and it just adds to the scorn of human life because we can't do that.

That is to miss completely the distinction that is so clearly made here and all elsewhere in Scripture between innocent blood and blood guilt. Unjust taking of innocent life is not at all equivalent to judicial taking of guilty life in proportionate punishment for murder according to God.

and also that argument fails to realize that if God himself sanctions the taking of life under any circumstances then that cannot in and of itself be intrinsically morally wrong can it?

[18 : 31] After all we have to recognize that God himself inflicts capital punishment on every single human being in the end for our sin. Moses says in Psalm 90 we are brought to an end by your anger.

All our days pass away under your wrath. Every one of us is subject to the sentence of death. So as Western Christians today we have to be careful.

We are so deeply infected by our culture around us which is so sentimental so squeamish about any kind of punishment let alone capital punishment. We need to be very careful that we are not setting ourselves up as morally superior to God himself.

Human beings have no absolute right to life only in so far as God our creator grants that life and God himself also is the one who has the right to demand the forfeiture of that life as he does here for crimes of murder.

And of course we can't just by the way set aside this and say well this was all just something due to the era of Moses and the law and we are in the new covenant it's different. No, no, no. This is something that goes right back way before the land of Israel right back to God's word in Genesis 9 after the flood whoever sheds the blood of man by man his blood shall be shed because I will require a reckoning for the blood of man that is what God says.

[19 : 58] So friends we have to take that seriously nevertheless we also have to be very careful because this passage I think also urges great caution upon us.

It is not a chapter for unbridled hang-em and flog-em attitudes. Justice plainly says is not served by hot anger not served by a revenge mentality.

No, great care must be taken not to add to the bloodshed by a wrong conviction and certainly by a wrong execution. That is as bad as failure to punish murder properly according to God.

So those who believe that capital punishment is the appropriate punishment for murder today they do also have to ask the question and it's a real question do we consider that our criminal justice system is good enough and safe enough to be sure that we are not taking innocent life and not executing those who should not be executed.

And that is a valid argument not against the righteousness of capital punishment per se for murder but against the practice of it which may be very difficult it may even be impossible to administer safely and properly.

[21 : 12] And then of course there's also the question of whether such a thing can be done in a humane way that doesn't demean human dignity which is something that is due even to the convicted criminal.

We'll see that later in chapter 23 and chapter 25. Even a criminal does have human dignity before God. And we have to consider also the very inhumane realities of prisoners on death row for example in the United States for many many years all these laugh minute reprieves and all these terrible suffering these are double punishments.

We have to consider also these sometimes gruesome stories about botched executions. And these are the sort of things that have made people more and more horrified about the whole apparatus of capital punishment as it is practiced today in the United States.

Never mind in the many manifestly unjust and brutal dictatorships where there are utterly horrific practices in so many places. So I think we also have to recognize seriously that it may very well be in our societies in the West where we have fallen so far from God's righteous standards in so many areas of life that we are actually incapable now of even administering proper justice in a way that isn't so corrupted that it will add to further guilt rather than purge the crime of unjust murder and so on from our midst.

And at the same time actually I think it's rather ironic isn't it that the more muddled we've become about this whole area of crime and punishment the less merciful we have become as a society also.

[22 : 50] Isn't it true that in our world today nobody's even allowed to make the slightest mistake before they're being howled down on Twitter and Facebook and everywhere else with demands for justice and demands for punishment. Some figure in public life only has to utter the wrong word by mistake or the wrong phrase and immediately they're branded a sexist or a racist or a homophobe or an Islamophobe or whatever it might be and the minute the word is uttered they're out.

There's no sanctuary there's no place to hide until some rational thought and inquiry takes place as to the context of the words or the circumstances or the actual motive of what was said or what was done.

It's ironic isn't it? But that is our world it is virtually the reverse of what we read here in verses 1 to 12 very striking. But shouldn't in that case the church of our Lord Jesus Christ be the one place where that is not so?

Where there is real justice and real mercy in a visible and a tangible way and where there is yes not softness not sentimentality in the face of real sin and wickedness no real discipline which alas has been so absent in the western church for so long but also real sanctuary real mercy for those who have made mistakes who have messed up who need refuge who need recovery in a place of safety.

if you read numbers 35 you'll have seen something that I think is no accident which is that these cities of refuge were to be drawn from the cities specifically allocated to the Levites the Levites remember were those who taught the word of God and their cities therefore the place where the word of God was guarded and cherished and taught constantly in the midst and isn't that a wonderful picture that where God's word is being guarded and cherished and heard and taught where God's servants are making that word known there is a place of sanctuary and safety and mercy and refuge and we should ask ourselves shouldn't we we who seek to be servants of the word of God today are we a people who harbor mercy who offer sanctuary and refuge to those who are fleeing from the consequences of terrible mistakes that they've made in their life distress that surrounds them is our church a place of sanctuary and mercy for the person who has stumbled and fallen and made a mistake are you and I the kind of people that somebody who's messed up badly can come to knowing that they will find not harsh reprisals but sanctuary mercy love care that should be so shouldn't it in the church of our

[25 : 34] Lord Jesus Christ well now let's look briefly at verses 15 to 21 because if life matters to God then these verses tell us also of course that lies always matter to God verse 15 reminds us of what we saw in chapter 17 that tells us that no one should be put to death on the testimony of just one witness always two or three but here notice this goes for any crime any wrong and any offense it's a general principle because look at verse 16 because alas malice is as real as murder and so perjury must be punished and must be deterred in order to protect people from wrong accusations perhaps from powerful vindictive people against those who were vulnerable that's often so today as well although of course in our misguided society we have so empowered children to a place of great authority that it's children and young people today who often have that power to make very grave accusations against people and ruin their lives as a result many a person in public life not least teachers might face a claim of assault or sexual assault of some kind and years later they may be proven to be completely spurious and false but by then it's far too late somebody's life has been ruined their health has been ruined their job has been lost their family torn apart we've seen that too haven't we recently with these high profile historic sex abuse cases those accusations against

Cliff Richard or poor Leon Britton who died before he was exonerated but it was too late and you see that is why what we have here before us in these verses must be taken so seriously that's why these accusations verse 17 are taken to the highest court the court we read about in chapter 17 that's why due diligence verse 18 must be done and so if it is a spurious claim if it's a malicious claim there must be real deterrence through severe punishment verse 19 outlines that you must do to him exactly as he had meant to do to the accused now this is the context notice of verse 21 the lex talionis the law of retribution which surely is one of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses in the whole bible but you can see here can't you it is not at all a verse commanding unbridled vengeance it's quite the opposite it is a verse that demands exact proportionality the punishment must fit the crime exactly so that if you know that you're trying to bring ill upon somebody else through lies through false accusations then in fact you will know that exactly the same thing will be meted out to you to your cost it is exact justice no more no less that's what it means an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and if the malicious accusation is seeking to bring something so serious that would bring a death penalty on somebody else then that severe perjury must result in severe punishment in return that is a very powerful deterrent don't you think so don't misunderstand this this is not a personal instruction for vengeance from anybody absolutely opposite it is a legal code for judges and it limits vengeance and it demands exact proportional justice now we might well ask just how much less false accusation and malicious accusation there might be in our world today if something like this pertained in our own legal code so if you claim fraud on your insurance then you are forced to pay up exactly what you claim for you don't just have your claim turned down apparently that's the reason why all our insurance premiums are going up and up and up for our cars and our houses even for holiday insurance you've probably seen in the papers that Britain's abroad are now got into the habit of when they come home from their holiday claiming that they got an upset stomach and a gastroenteritis from the hotel they were staying in and they get a payout on their insurance they diddle the insurers your premiums and mine go up and also they ruin the reputation of that hotel so how about this if you're found to be a fraud you pay up everything you claimed against that hotel and you get injected with a dose of salmonella how about that that would stop it or if you claim for whiplash injury in a car accident which everybody now seems to claim for even if they were doing one mile an hour you don't just get no money for your claim you pay up what you had claimed and you get put in a car and given a real whiplash injury how about that or much more seriously if you do claim that you're raped by somebody and you wreck their career and their job and their family and their health and their reputation then you likewise will face complete public ruin and your life and your reputation truth and lies always matter to

God and so reverence for human life is expressed in the purging of malicious accusations and so above all in the Christian church don't we need to give serious thought to what passes from our lips about others especially about our brothers and sisters in Christ Christian gossip can be a terribly corrosive thing can't it a malicious thing even a very destructive thing listen to the Lord Jesus out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks I tell you on the day of judgment people will give an account of every careless word they speak for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned that's a very sobering word isn't it and equally sobering I think to realize that the Lord himself and his apostles have to quote verse 15 to the

New Testament church because clearly they are not naive about the reality of the hearts of believers and our capacity to lie and our capacity to speak with malicious intent even within the church of Jesus Christ isn't that terrible so perhaps we need to take the second half of verse 19 much more seriously than we ever realize and begin purging the evil that is in our own hearts and seeking forgiveness for our thoughts and our words and our deeds even of malice towards others truth and lies matter to God and therefore surely they should matter to us his people well now what about this verse 14 right in the middle of our chapter here all about cherishing life and about justice in matters of life what is this verse doing here well its message is that if life matters greatly to God and if lies matter greatly to God then likewise landmarks always matter to God and this verse you see tells us that reverence for life is expressed above all in preserving not only God's gifts of earthly life and livelihood but also his gift to his people our great inheritance of everlasting life in his kingdom verse 14 you shall not move your neighbors landmark which the men of old have set in the inheritance that you will hold in the land the Lord your

God is giving you to possess and there's obviously a close connection between a family's land and their earthly livelihood and therefore their life if you move their boundary stones you're stealing some of their life giving land and therefore you're attacking their life so that's one obvious reason for this verse to be here in the middle of this discussion about protecting life and of course since the land was God's own personal gift to every tribe every clan and family in Israel then if you stole something from them like that it was an affront to God himself you're stealing from God that's why Proverbs 23 verse 10 says do not move an ancient landmark or enter the field of the fatherless for their redeemer is strong and he will plead their cause against you you're dealing with God you're stealing from him so God is against you if you do that and that's why when you come to chapter 27 of Deuteronomy and all the covenant curses you find a curse here like this cursed is anyone who moves his neighbor's landmarks deadly serious because you begin to take someone's life when you steal their livelihood that's worth noting isn't it that this is not just a property crime it's a crime against somebody's life the person is being violated and that's true when you think about think about the huge stress even the illness that is caused when when people are defrauded there's so much fraud going on today so many scams on the internet and so on somebody somebody here was just telling me recently about how they'd had their bank accounts emptied by fraudsters let me tell you that caused a great deal of stress even illness you can imagine it so behind all of these commands even about property and things like that lie God's concern for the person for human life that's why you're not to lie that's why you're not to bear false witness that's why you're not to steal it's why you're not to covet because

[35 : 23] God cares for human life it's ultimately a care for human life that is behind all these other commands and they all forbid the exploiting of other human beings especially the weak especially the vulnerable to do anything that would harm their livelihood and their lives and that is clearly at issue here in this verse but there is much much more to it let me say even than that look again at verse 14 the key words there in other words inheritance and possession and Israelites inheritance was his God-given stake not only in any old land but in the land of God's promise it was their promise of a future in God's promised kingdom it was their tangible token if you like of their membership of God's household it was their stake not just therefore in their passing earthly life but in their permanent life before the

Lord who is himself life that's why you remember back in Genesis Abraham although he was quite content all his life to live in tents going through the land of Canaan do you remember he was insistent when Sarah his wife died that he buy a plot of land in Canaan the cave in Machpelah where he buried his wife where he himself was then buried where his son was buried when Jacob who died in Egypt was taken all the way back to be buried in that place and his stake in the promised land and Joseph remember who commanded that in the future when you go out from here in the Exodus to come you will take my bones with you and bury them in that plot in the promised land why do you care if you're Joseph when you're dead where your bones are buried because as Hebrews chapter 11 tells us plainly these men of faith knew that the inheritance that God promised them was no mere earthly country but a heavenly country their city was a city being built to them by God they were looking for the reward that

God had promised an eternal reward and an Israelite's inheritance you see was his God-given birthright it was to him the earnest of that future reward it was the blessing of God's promise to his people forever and so to lose that to be deprived of that or to despise that and give it up well that was to give up everything that God had promised far far more than your earthly life but your life everlasting with God just think of two examples that are very familiar to us in the Bible that show us just how seriously God takes this matter of guarding his promised inheritance then later on to the book of Kings 1 Kings 21 don't look it up but read it later you know the story of Ahab don't you and Naboth's vineyard wicked King Ahab and his even more wicked wife Jezebel and Ahab coveted the vineyard of a man called Naboth he liked the look of it so he said to Naboth I like your vineyard I'll give you another one or I'll buy it from you but you see it wasn't just a vineyard it was Naboth's promise of the blessing of God's inheritance to him and his family forever it was his stake in the kingdom of God and that's why when Ahab came to him

Naboth said this the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers well of course you know what happened egged on by Jezebel Ahab had the man murdered and took his vineyard and God cursed Ahab and Jezebel most severely to death because of that crime far worse than stealing a vineyard putting in jeopardy a man's inheritance in the kingdom of God forever Naboth lost his earthly life but he did not lose his inheritance because he would not despise it and give it up but think of another one who thought very differently about his inheritance in God's land Esau do you remember way back in Genesis he was only too eager to give away his birthright his promise of God's blessing for a mere bowl of soup so he gave away his eternal promise of God for the passing satisfaction of a mere earthly appetite and you remember the chilling reminder in Hebrews chapter 12 afterwards we're told when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected he found no chance to repent although he sought it with tears he despised his inheritance and you see why landmarks here are so important to God so sacrosanct and inviolable because if God takes great serious with great seriousness any threat at all to a violation of earthly human life how much more will he take seriously the threat to the things that pertain to the eternal promises of everlasting life do you think that might matter for us today but doesn't

Peter tell us that we also share a living hope that we are born again to an inheritance kept in heaven for us and doesn't Jude likewise warn us that we have a great responsibility he says to keep ourselves and to keep one another in the love of God waiting for that eternal life when Jesus appears that's why Jude wrote isn't it to urge God's people to stay true to the faith once for all delivered to the saints we might say to the landmarks which men of old have set about your faith to mark the boundaries of your true inheritance of God's true promise and not to follow the ungodly people that the landmark movers who have crept in to pervert the grace of God to deny the truth about our Lord and our master Jude's letter is all about those who would move the great spiritual landmarks that guarantee our eternal inheritance in the true kingdom of Christ and people who do that damage and cause to stumble vulnerable people so they might stumble and fall and lose even their inheritance in the kingdom think of the warnings of our Lord Jesus himself about that things which cause my little ones to stumble and to fall that is to jeopardize their eternal inheritance they will come says Jesus but whoa whoa to those through whom they come better a millstone tied around their neck and cast into the depths of sea than to cause one of these my little ones to stumble kingdom landmarks kingdom landmarks above all are the things that matter to God we dare not ever ever temple with those milestones so in that regard it is very chilling isn't it to think about so many in our day in the professing church of Jesus Christ theologians leaders people of infants whose whole careers have been dedicated to moving and even removing altogether the great and precious landmarks the boundary stones of the gospel of our inheritance the faith once for all delivered by the men of old by the prophets by the apostles of Christ and surely a day of reckoning is coming for such as these cursed be anyone who removes a neighbor's landmarks says Deuteronomy 27 who jeopardizes his inheritance in my kingdom of life woe to you scribes and Pharisees theologians and churchmen says the Lord Jesus Christ for you have shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces because you have tampered with and moved removed altogether sometimes the great landmarks of the doctrines of the true gospel of God here's what one writer says terrible will be the accounting of men who while posing as instructors of the flock of God have all the while been Satan's instruments overthrowing the saving truth of scripture you shall not move your neighbor's landmark which the men of old have set in the inheritance you hold in the promise of God's eternal kingdom friends that's a solemn thought isn't it but God loves and cherishes the breath of human life that he has breathed into human beings made in his own image and likeness life always matters to him and therefore so does truth and all lies matter to him especially when they would jeopardize human life and likewise any tempering with with landmarks that would jeopardize or even deprive others of life it matters to God and will not go unpunished but how much more does God cherish and love the inheritance of eternal life that he has

[44 : 46] won at infinite cost in the blood of his son and how much more will he love and honor those who cherish and protect that life above all other things and how much more will he oppose and judge those who would jeopardize and destroy that life in others by disregarding and destroying landmarks of his abiding eternal gospel grace so i think the message to us is plain let us determine never to allow ourselves never to allow one another never to allow our church to endanger in that way the future of any in his kingdom but rather let's be a people who show reverence above all for life cherishing not only god's gift of earthly life but cherishing his surpassing gift of the eternal inheritance that is ours in jesus christ let us cherish the breath of god's life well let's pray heavenly father how thankful we are that you are the god of life and even in this world of death you are reversing its curse cherishing life loving life and above all promising an inheritance of everlasting life to every one of your own help us to be people who love life who guard who protect it especially the innocent the weak to guard all from stumbling above all in ways that would endanger their future of eternal life and help us to cherish and never scorn the great landmarks that you have given us of your eternal kingdom in christ help us to love the gospel to guard the gospel to proclaim the gospel to live the gospel to live the gospel that the boundaries of your kingdom might be seen and known and heard and delighted in and entered into again and again and again in our midst in this city that we love and in our land and all throughout the world so lord help us to that end and keep us as people of the lord of life for we ask it in jesus name our