

Deuteronomy Chapter 31 v 1 - 13

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[0 : 00] Deuteronomy chapter 31, Deuteronomy in chapter 31 and the first 13 verses. While you're turning there, can I just remind those of you involved with the older young people on a Tuesday night that there's a leaders meeting, brief leaders meeting after this morning's service.

So if you're involved in the older young people's club on the Tuesday night, please can you meet probably in the coffee lounge and then you'll be taken off somewhere I should imagine.

So Deuteronomy chapter 31 and we're going to read the first 13 verses together. Let's hear the word of God and then after we've read this then will the children in Sunday school and crash like to go out then.

Thank you. Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel. I am now 120 years old and I am no longer able to lead you.

The Lord has said to me, you shall not cross the Jordan. The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you and you will take possession of their land.

[1 : 08] Joshua also will cross over ahead of you as the Lord said. And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sion and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land.

The Lord will deliver them to you and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them.

For the Lord God goes with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him, in the presence of all Israel, be strong and courageous.

For you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give to them. And you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you.

He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel.

[2 : 13] Then Moses commanded them, at the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing.

Assemble the people, men, women, and children, and the aliens living in their towns, so that they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God, and follow carefully all the words of this law.

Their children who do not know this law must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess. We thank God for his word.

If the children would like to go now, thank you. I'm thinking just a few moments ago, with the children about the Roehiller, and that shipwreck, but there's been many stories and adventures of people shipwrecked on desert islands and isolated places.

Of course, my great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, Robinson Crusoe, of course, was the first of those stories. And... No, not really. And that was written, of course, by Daniel Defoe a few hundred years ago.

[3 : 50] And his story of Robinson Crusoe was almost certainly influenced by the real-life experiences of a Scotsman called Alexander Selkirk, who himself was shipwrecked for more than four years on a Pacific island, which is now known as Robinson Crusoe Island.

But in that novel, of course, Crusoe is on the island for about 28 years in the story, and along the way, eventually, he meets with a runaway native man who he can't speak to to begin with or talk to, but it gives him the name Friday, and he becomes a great colleague to him and helps him with the tremendous burden of isolation and loneliness which he had endured for so many years.

In a recent film called *Cast Away* in the year 2000, Tom Hanks stars as a man after a plane crash stranded on a tropical island. He becomes so desperately lonely that he eventually imagines he can talk to and being talked back to by a volleyball who has the name Wilson and who he paints a face on the front to help him to cope with his loneliness.

There can be few things more difficult to bear than being isolated, which is, of course, why prisoners, as a way of punishment, are put in isolation block, and we thought about that just last week with some of the suffering church, people like Richard Wurmbrand, four years in solitary confinement as a Christian, suffering under the communist rule.

The reason why we find, of course, isolation and loneliness so difficult is because we've been designed by a God who is himself in fellowship. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Godhead, that incredible mystery that we call the Trinity, created us, we're told, in their image.

[5 : 50] And part of that image is that we are to be in communion, fellowship with one another. We are social creatures, which is so important, a part of our makeup.

And therefore, we find that there are some wonderful promises in God's word, not only about the friendship that we have in Christ as Christians, and so important that we are part of a local church. That's one of the ways we express who we are. We need one another. We share together with one another. But also we find that we have a wonderful promise from God concerning the whole matter of isolation and loneliness.

In Hebrews 13 and verse 5, the writer says this, God has said, Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. Now, that promise comes across in various ways through the Bible, various promises. Jesus himself, when he was about to ascend to heaven, said to his disciples, Lo, behold, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.

[6 : 56] But that promise of, I will never leave you or forsake you, goes back to where we read from in Deuteronomy. And chapter 31. And I want us to think about this promise, because it is a promise to us as God's people.

A promise to us in all sorts of circumstances and situations we face. It is a promise which, if we can appreciate it and believe it and experience it, is one of greatest comfort, greatest help, and encouragement in our lives.

So if you have your Bible open at Deuteronomy 31, where we read before that, it would be helpful as we look at the occasion when God gives that promise through Moses, his servant.

And first of all, we find that it is given to all of Israel, all of God's people. We might say to the church, to that company of those who belonged to the Lord.

And the promise is there for them. Verse 6. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them. That's the kings and the powerful people in the land of Canaan.

[8 : 09] For the Lord your God goes with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. And so we see that this promise is given to all of God's people, all of those who have been brought into this wonderful covenant relationship with God.

Whoever we are, whatever our background, if we are Christians this morning, then to the whole of us, to us as a local church as well, God speaks that promise. Never will I leave you nor forsake you. Now, the local church here has been going 41 years and a bit. and those who have been here all that time, those are the ones who have got the sloping shoulders and the furrowed brow.

No, no. They're the ones that are the most joyful. Those who have been here all that time can testify that this promise is true. God has never left nor forsaken his people in this church.

But it was especially a relevant promise because of what was happening to God's people here. You see, what was happening especially was that Moses was about to leave them.

[9 : 18] Moses had been there all those 40 years while they had been traveling in the wilderness. He was the one who God had called and appointed to be the instrument that set them free from 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

And he was the one who God had used to lead them through the Red Sea, lead them through the wilderness, lead them to the promised land, lead them through times of great trouble and difficulty. Particularly, the reason that he'd had to lead them for 40 years was because right at the very start of his leadership, they rebelled against God.

They wouldn't obey him. They wouldn't go into the promised land as God had said they should. And so they had to wander until those who had rebelled against God had died in the desert.

But now this Moses, this one who'd led them, this one who God had used to provide water from the rock in the desert, the one that God had used to provide the manna from heaven to feed them, now he was going to leave them.

Now everything was going to change. Now after 40 years, he wasn't going to be there anymore. See, Moses was much more than just a leader, wasn't he? He was a patriarch, a father figure in one sense to them.

[10:29] They looked to him for direction. They looked to him for leading. They looked to him to provide their needs. He was the one through whom God had given the law and the instructions as we read about here as well.

And now they'd be on their own. Now they'd be without their captain, if I'm not with that one. Now they'd be without their Moses. So this promise, in one sense, has particular relevance, we might say, to those of us who feel bereft.

bereft. Those of us who feel as if we have lost someone very, very special. It may be a parent or it may be a partner.

It may be someone who is very dear to us, precious to us, a close friend. In those times of bereavement, in those times of loss, when somebody isn't there anymore, then this promise comes to its fore.

For God says, never will I leave you nor forsake you. And we can't help the fact that dear loved ones leave us because of death. Or maybe they have to leave us because of other reasons as well.

[11:34] But ultimately, in death, they can't help it. They may want to stay with us when they wish that they would stay with us. But God says, never will I leave you nor forsake you.

All others may leave, but I will never leave you. He is our Heavenly Father. He is unchanging. He is not affected by death, not affected by illness, not affected by those temporary things around about us that deliver us from those that we love.

He is the God who owns Abraham as his friend. He is the one, really, who sticks closer than any brother. Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.

But also there was something else happening here that meant that they needed this promise. Not only were they losing Moses, the one who led them through all those battles and difficulties and problems and trials and sins and so on, but now they were on the threshold of something very radically different.

They were going to go into the promised land. They were going into Canaan. They were going into that place that God had promised them and their forefathers for generations before. the place where it was so scary 40 years ago that their parents had rebelled against God and said, no, we can't go there because the people who live there are like giants and we're just like grasshoppers to them.

[12:58] Now they were going to go in and inhabit this land. And they were afraid. They were scared. This was a new venture, a new step.

They'd been used to living in their tents and living in the desert. It wasn't the nicest place to live. It wasn't great, but it was comfortable. They'd got used to it. Now it was a radical change.

Now it was a big difference. Now they were going into a land. They weren't going to be wandering around in the desert anymore. Now they were going to be living in houses. Now they were going to be fighting battles. Now they were going to be in places of greenery and luxury and so on.

But there were many difficulties to face them. It was obviously going to be very difficult because God says to them, be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified. God knows their hearts as he knows your heart and mine.

He knows the fears we battle with. He knows the struggles we have. He knows our fears for the future, about what's around the corner, about what's going to come in the new year, about what's going to happen next week or with a new job or a new position or whatever it may be.

[14:06] They were going to face opposition and they were going to face resistance. So God says to them, never will I leave you or forsake you.

In fact, he says he goes because the Lord your God goes with you. What's around the corner for you? What's the future for you?

Is it a new work position? Is it a promotion? Is it news that you've heard concerning your own situation? Is it fears that you have for your children, your grandchildren?

So many things, can't they? So many unseen possibilities ahead. If we were to sit down and worry about them, we would worry ourselves to death about the possibility of what could go wrong and what might happen.

But, here's the promise, never will I leave you or forsake you. As we go, God goes with us. We don't go alone. We don't go into the darkness by ourselves.

[15:05] We don't step out on our own. So God says to his people, what about us as a church, as a group of people here, as God's people in Whitby or your local church?

You think, well, what's the future hold? You know, what's happening? We're all getting older. Somebody said just recently, well, yeah, that's pretty obvious. We're all getting older. You know, where's the future of the church?

What's going to happen in five years or ten years or so many years' time? I will never leave you nor forsake you, says the Lord. The Lord goes with you.

We don't know. There's no point in us guessing. There's no point in us thinking, well, it might be this or it might be that or worrying about it. What we're called to do is go forward. In obedience.

So God's promise, never will I leave you or forsake you, is given to the church, given to all God's people. But then we see as well that just a little later, just almost in that same conversation, Moses turns to Joshua and gives the promise not to a group but to an individual.

[16:14] There in verses seven following, the Moses summoned Joshua and said to him, in the presence of all Israel, be strong and courageous. You must go with this people into the land the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them and you must divide it among them as their inheritance.

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Now Moses had this tremendous responsibility that he was going to be handed on the responsibility that was Moses's.

Moses 40 years. I know some pastors who've been ministers of their churches for 40 years, 45 years and then I pity the poor pastor who has to come afterwards.

He can never live up to it, can he? But, you know, no matter how wonderful that pastor is, perhaps you've been in a position in your workplace and you've had to step up to take the place of somebody else or teaching role or whatever it may be.

It's very hard, isn't it, to fill somebody else's shoes. Joshua now is going to lead the people into Canaan, what Moses failed to do. God was calling Joshua to do with a certain prospect that there were going to be several years of fighting ahead.

[17:31] And no doubt he was overwhelmed with the huge responsibility and the challenge. And that's why God gives him a personal promise. Yes, the promise was true to him when it was given to all the people but now God singles him out and gives him that personal promise.

Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. He gives that promise of faith in one sense to step out of trusting him. Responsibilities we feel, we can feel very inadequate for.

those of us who are fathers and mothers, parents, we can feel inadequate to bring and raise our children up in this very broken and very polluted and corrupted world. How can we do what's best for them as grandparents as well when we have less input into the lives of our children or grandchildren, where we have responsibilities in schools or in the workplace, where we have responsibilities with family and friends or neighbours, responsibilities in Sunday school or in church, in all sorts of areas we are given that responsibility and the responsibility to live the Christian life in this world can overwhelm us.

It can be so difficult, can't it? It is so difficult to face these challenges and yet here is the promise to us, it's the promise to Joshua and it's to us, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

We can trust him. Well how does this promise help us? See a promise is like this is of the greatest comfort to us when we understand what it's guaranteeing us.

[19:12] What actually does it mean? What does it mean I will never leave you or forsake you? What does it mean that God is with us? Well it promises us and assures us that we shall never be forsaken by God.

It promises us that God will not forsake us. Well what does that mean? What does it mean to be forsaken by God? Well there's only really one place where we read about someone who truly experienced what it was to be forsaken by God.

And that of course is the Lord Jesus Christ. For in the Gospel of Matthew as well as in of the other Gospels we're told that Jesus on the cross as he was suffering and dying in our place cries out in a

loud voice in Aramaic Eloi Eloi lama samakthani which we're told means this my God my God why have you forsaken me?

Now we have felt all of us at times loneliness. We have felt perhaps even that sense of being forsaken by God. Lord where are you in this situation? But we have never ever experienced this no matter who we are or how we've lived.

That we should cry as Jesus truly cried from his experience my God my God why have you forsaken me? He is the one person who in this life has felt and experienced the abandonment of God.

[20 : 36] I want us to think about this for a moment because when we think about this then we're helped to understand what it is that God promises not to do for those who put their faith and trust in him. Not to do.

We see of course that in this cry Jesus has experienced the deepest and most incomprehensible sort of loneliness. Loneliness.

He was abandoned by his disciples that was difficult enough they all ran off and left him at Gethsemane when he was arrested and that must have been very painful for someone who had loved them and cared for them for three years and shared everything with them.

But nothing could have prepared him for this cry of dereliction as it were. For all eternity past Christ the Son of God had enjoyed fellowship and communion with God the Father and the Spirit.

They had been one for all of time and before time. Together they had created the world. Together they had planned salvation and rescue for sinners. Only now in these few hours of darkness only now in the whole of eternity did God the Son feel loneliness.

[21 : 55] A darkness fell over him and over the land. A loneliness that no one else has ever known or felt. God why did Jesus do that?

Why did he suffer that loneliness? Why did he suffer that abandonment? That forsakenness so that he couldn't help but cry out those words? He did that so that we might be brought into everlasting fellowship with God so that we might forever know God's presence with us and communion and fellowship with him.

John writes this wonderful letter 1 John and in it he says our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. God did not send his Son into the world simply to rescue us from our sin and from hell.

Yes he did that and so necessary it was but rather than that God rescued and saved us for himself that we might know him that we might be in relationship with him that we might enjoy him and his presence and his nearness.

Sin separates us from God. Sin must separate us from God because he is holy and good. Our sin is horrible and vile and nasty.

[23 : 07] It's nasty enough for us when we see it in its wicked forms but it's all the more so for God and that means that we are outcasts from the presence of God because of our sin.

We are separated from him alienated from him from his smile from his love from his care. But dear Christian friends Jesus suffered loneliness that we might never ever be alone.

Wherever you are wherever you go whatever you feel whatever you think whatever other people say or do to you he will never leave you he will never forsake you he is with you.

But in that cry of the Lord Jesus we find that surely not only was there an experience of utter loneliness abandonment bereftness but also in that cry surely we see as well that there was a sense of utter despair of hopelessness.

Hopelessness I want to put it that way. To be without God is to be in the most hopeless situation in the whole of humanity.

[24 : 24] We can if we are without friends that's hard. If we are without family that's difficult but to be without God is the most hopeless situation. Paul as he writes to the Christians in Ephesus reminds them that there was a time when they were without hope and without God in the world.

There is no hope. What hope is there for the future? What hope is there for death? What hope is there for heaven without God? It's hopeless to live these few years 70 80 years 100 years maybe and then what?

Nothing. What hope is given through science? Nothing. Because we can only keep our bodies going so long. What hope is given through atheism?

Nothing because we're just told that's the end and there's oblivion. But what hope is there except with God? Christ had a taste of that hopelessness that despair when he was in the garden of Gethsemane.

There he cried out Father if it's possible take this cup away from me the cup of suffering the cup of pain that he was to endure. We know that he was in such anguish that he sweat drops of blood.

[25 : 37] Something that has happened in other situations and people are under intense despair and pressure and stress. But now only now upon the cross did he know the real thing and experience the real thing of hopelessness.

That was it. If God abandons you if God gives up on you there's nothing anybody can do for you. There's nothing anybody can give you. There's nothing that no money can provide.

No friendship can provide. No help can provide. But dear friends here's the wonderful thing. The Lord Jesus Christ tasted and endured the hopelessness of the abandonment of God so that we might have hope because God is with us and however hopeless the situations we face however dark the days ahead if we have God with us then we need not be afraid.

We need not be hopeless. We have hope. You may be looking out on the future may be looking out on the situations and circumstances may be looking out on the community and the world in which we live and we say Lord how can you do anything here in Whitby or wherever we are when so many tens of thousands of people are without you and rejecting you and in darkness how can you possibly say hopes in God in who he is and what he's done and what he's done in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

See the amazing thing is this that all those people who live in this world and those of you here who are not Christians this morning whether you realize it or not God is with you.

[27 : 19] God has been the one who's provided for you life today. He's been the one who's blessed you in your work and in your family and in your home. He's the God even whether you recognize it or not or give him thanks or not has been the one who has given you breath for each moment of every day.

You just haven't realized it. You just haven't acknowledged it. You haven't given him the prideful place in your life that you should do. You've thought you've managed it on your own. You've thought it's been down to your parents or been down to your skill or something else but it hasn't.

It's been God's goodness to you. His common grace to you. You see when death comes and God removes those things from you then you really have got hopelessness and that's really what hell is all about.

It's when God is not there. It's the removal of every blessing that God gives. Love, friendship, warmth, comfort, hope, peace, all the very opposites of those things because God removes himself from us.

Life without God is really hopeless. Death without God is never ending hopelessness.

hopelessness. But our Lord Jesus Christ tasted of that hopelessness.

[28 : 38] He drank the cup of that hopelessness so that we should never know that hopelessness. So that we should never be in a situation of despair. Never be overwhelmed with anxiety.

Never be in that place where we do not know that God is with us and for us. never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.

Our sins call for God to forsake us but Christ calls for God to never forsake us because he was forsaken for us. He was made hopeless in our place.

Just as we close dear friends, perhaps even now as you're thinking about this promise you say, well it's all well and good. Peter, you saying that, it's all well and good. You telling me that God will never leave me or forsake me but how do I know it's true?

You don't know my circumstance, you don't know my situation, you don't know my sins, you don't know my past, you don't know how my doubts fill my mind, why should I take this promise to be true?

[29 : 40] Why should I believe it and cling to it and rejoice in it? Well because of this. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 5, God has said.

It's not Peter has said or so and so has said, or the apostle Paul has said, true though his words were as we have them in the scripture but no God has said, they are not the words of a man.

We make all sorts of promises to one another, I'll never leave you, forsake you. People promise themselves to one another in marriage every day but again sadly those words are not worth the

paper they're written on.

And even in ourselves, even when God helps us and enables us to be faithful and loving in our marriages and our relationships, we still drift, we still wander, we still at times aren't faithful in the way that we act and behave and loving.

We aren't always there for our loved ones but God is not a man, he's not a human being, he cannot lie, he cannot deny his word, he cannot break his promise. He has said it and therefore it can and must remain.

[30 : 45] for God words are not cheap, just look at the cross. For God to forsake you mean that he would have to cease to be God.

For God to leave you, dear Christian friend, would mean that God have to deny himself and stop being who he has always been for all eternity. No, dear friends, take this promise, don't let the doubts of the world and of the devil rob you of the comfort and the joy and the assurance of this promise that wherever you are, in whatever situation you find yourself, whatever is behind and whatever is before, God has said to you and says to you again today, I will never leave you nor forsake you, I will be with you.

Take that promise, take it to your heart. If you need to do what the Old Testament people did and write the promises on the doorpost of your house, write them on the walls, bind them onto your arm and onto your head.

Think about that promise, meditate upon that promise, make it such a reality, such an assurance, such a confidence to you that it will be light to you in all the dark days to come.

And it's going to come one day when you're never going to need that promise again. It's going to come a day when you're never going to have to believe it by faith, when you're not going to need to remind yourself of it. Because that promise looks forward to a day when we shall know and experience and feel the very nearness of God.

[32 : 24] That's where we're heading. We're heading from this world to that place of being with God. Here's the last book of the Bible, Revelation, the last but one chapter.

And it tells us this, I heard a loud voice from the throne of heaven saying, now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

We are heading to be with God. He is with us and one day we shall be with him. Well let's pray together before we sing our final hymn.

For you to give us that promise, oh Lord, cost you a lot. For you never to forsake us or leave us meant that your dear son, the Lord Jesus, had to be forsaken and left to suffer and die for our sins and in our place.

[33 : 47] Oh Lord, we thank you again that though our sins call for you to ostracize us and to push us away and in one sense our sins are us pushing you away.

Yet we thank you that in Jesus you bring us near and you come near and you stay near. And we again pray, oh Lord, for those of us particularly who have never known the nearness of God.

That even this morning we would say, Lord, come near to me. I want to know you. I want to know your nearness. I want to know that wonderful sense of you never forsaking or leaving but being with me.

Thank you that you have already said, Lord Jesus, come to me all you are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Lord, move those hearts Lord, to come to you. For you know that, Lord, we take one step to you and you come running to us.

We pray for those of us, Lord, who feel very much on our own. Lord, maybe there's lots of people around about us and lots of people who care for us but we feel on our own because we're facing circumstances and pressures and difficulties which seem so great.

[34 : 55] We just can't really express them. Lord, again we ask that this promise of your nearness may be a reality for us and we may take great comfort and encouragement from it. For those of us who really are physically alone at times, Lord, when we feel bereft, oh Lord, come to us and help us again to draw from you that wonderful sense of care.

Thank you that you are the God who knows each one of us and we thank you that you are the God who will never leave us nor forsake us. Lead us then, go with us then in the days ahead for we ask

it in your name of your dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen. Let's sing.