

God Goes Before Us

by John McGregor

God has a plan, is present with us, and has the power to change every situation, but we must respond by surrendering our lives to Him and trusting in His promises.

Duration: 31:38

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:1

Topics: "Sovereignty Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the faithfulness of God in the past year and encourages the congregation to look forward to the new year with hope. He emphasizes the promise that God goes before His people, providing comfort and guidance in uncertain times. The speaker also highlights the assurance that God will rescue and deliver His people from captivity and oppression. He concludes by urging the congregation to trust in God's promises and to approach the new year with faith and expectation.

Transcript

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for your word, Lord, and God, we thank you that you are our all. I just ask that you would speak through this man this morning, that we would have ears to hear and minds to process and hearts to receive. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thank you, Pastor Brad. Good morning, everyone. I hope that you had a good Christmas and it's good to be together to worship.

Incidentally, next year, Christmas day, the 25th of December is a Sunday. So that'll be an exciting time, won't it? Yeah. I would like this morning just to, we're going to take a Sunday off from the Gospel of Luke.

And if you would turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 31, and I want to read the first eight verses of the chapter. And trust the Lord will give us a word of encouragement this morning to our hearts. Deuteronomy 31, and verse one says, Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel.

And he said to them, I'm 120 years old today. Makes me feel like a teenager. I'm 120 years old today.

I'm no longer able to go out and come in. The Lord has said to me, you shall not go over this Jordan. The Lord, your God himself will go over before you.

He will destroy those nations before you so that you shall dispossess them. And Joshua will go at your head as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sion and to Og, the kings of the Amorites and to their land when he destroyed them.

The Lord will give them over to you and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them.

For it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you. Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, be strong and courageous for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them.

And you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Father, your word is so tremendous.

And in these few moments this morning, we pray that you would take your word and impart it to our hearts by your Holy Spirit. That we might be strengthened in the inner person and equipped that as we leave this place this morning, there need be no fear in our hearts, but fellowship and worship for the one who is the Lord our God. So Father, bless this time we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, you know, the week between Christmas and New Year's is sometimes a time of reflection. And if you like to look back and think back, you can look and see, oh, the Lord has actually met all those challenges this year that I never thought I would get through. He has actually fulfilled everything that He said He would do.

And although there were bumps in the road in my year, every single one of them, God in His grace met the need and He has been so faithful. So we can at this time of year look back and say, wow, look what the Lord has done. And it's also a time when between Christmas and New Year's, we start to think about that new year.

And some people make New Year resolution and some of us need to make New Year restitution. And there's a lot of things that go on in hearts. And about this time every year, I say to myself, huh, you know, I would love to lose 20 pounds, 40 pounds or so in the next 12 months.

Yeah, maybe we won't linger on that thought really long this morning, but there are times when we sort of wonder what will this next 12 months bring? And that's what I'd like to just focus in on for a few minutes this morning before we wrap our Christmastime service up. Just thinking about when we face those unknown things that lay before us in the next 12 months. And you know, the children of Israel faced many unknowns.

And that's exactly what Moses is talking about here as he speaks to them. And these verses, he's talking about the fact that listen, you're going to go on as the people of God and that you're going to experience some things. But he also gives to us a perfect jewel to hold in our hearts at this time of year as we start to think about a new year and all that it could bring or might bring or all the what ifs or perhaps kind of questions.

Here are some things that just encourage my heart as I look here in the scripture. You think about that which is unknown to us, but look at what God gave to his people. And the first thing that you see is God has a plan.

He doesn't just do things sort of willy-nilly. God has a plan. And Moses is saying, I'm not gonna be a part of that particular situation anymore, I'm 120 years old.

But God has a plan and he is moving on along. And oh, how that encourages my heart. Some people have commented to me over the past year as I've enjoyed it being your pastor.

I think what they're trying to say, they put it in nice gracious terms, but I think what they're trying to say is, John, there are from time to time situations where we see that you're really Irish and stubborn. And why is it you just don't give up on some things? And I like to just look at it this way. If God's not finished, neither am I, amen.

If he's not finished, neither am I. And so when you think about the coming days and the challenges that they will bring, and sure, they will bring some, but they'll also bring some blessings because God has a plan. And in his plan, he never abandons his people. So I rejoice in this as he's talking to the people and he's saying that, look, this is God's plan and this is what's going to happen and so on.

So we can really do a whoo-hoo as we think about that clock ticking down to the end of 2010. I have an Irish pastor friend, Jim Sinclair, if he was here, has also met this brother, Hugh Moore. He's a Pentecostal pastor over in Ireland and I remember reading his year-end report one year and this is what it said.

This year is over, thank God. All I can say, he said, is good riddance. Now, you know, I kind of scratched my head a little bit when I read it and then I thought, but you know, Hugh is looking forward to what God is going to do in the coming year.

And isn't that where we want to be on New Year's Eve at the end of this week? Looking back at his faith, faithfulness, but looking forward to all that he's going to do in the days to come. As we focus in particularly on verse eight, what else did God give to his people as they step on into an uncertain future? Notice he's making promises and you can just take the verse and break it down. It is the Lord who goes before you.

Wow, I love that thought. You mean no matter where I go in the coming year, the Lord is gonna go before me? That's exactly what he's saying to his people. It's the Lord who goes before you.

And oh, what a difference that makes in life. You know, I like the promises of God because they're so rich and so full. You know, in Isaiah 46, verse four, he says, I will be with you even to your gray hairs.

Hallelujah! Just think, as you step into every day with the Lord Jesus as your Savior, he is going before you. As you go into those exams and move on along through another grade in the coming year, he goes before you. As you go into those situations that you wonder about and they're heavy on your heart, he goes before you.

Keep your finger there in Deuteronomy 31 and just flip over with me to Isaiah 49 in those last three verses of Isaiah 49. I doubt that there is a person in this room who does not have a family member that you worry about and pray about and are concerned about and think, how will they ever come to know Jesus? And how is this situation in my life, my family going to change? This morning, as we just reflect for a few moments on the things that God gives to us as his people, let me just read these three verses and comment on them briefly. God's been really working on this in my heart and it says, can the prey be taken from the mighty or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? For thus says the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken and the prey of the tyrant will be rescued.

For I will contend with those who contend with you and I will save your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord, your Savior, your Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob.

You know, it would seem almost impossible if you think of something that's been taken as prey in the wild. Animals take things for prey and they take them to kill them and to eat them and that's the end of the story for that thing, isn't it? And God's question is, can the prey be taken away from the mighty? And in a spiritual sense, there is one who is malevolent and evil and he loves to hold onto hearts and to lives and to destroy them and to destroy families as well and to bring devastation and destruction and death. Can the prey be taken from the mighty? And the other part of that question, captives taken away from the tyrant, there is nobody more tyrannical than the evil one himself who loves to really mess up lives and families.

And oh, dear ones, this morning, if I could just encourage you, even as God has encouraged my own heart in these verses, would you look at the promise? Maybe you have a brother, a sister, a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a cousin, someone who is far away from God, seemingly captivated by all the things that are wrong and all the glitter and the tinsel and the things that are supposed to satisfy us and yet they never do. Just look at the promise of God. What is it that he says here? The answer to his question is yes.

And the reason that God says this can happen is right there in the middle of verse 25. For I will contend with those who contend with you and I will save your children. Whoa, there is a promise.

You know, it's not that you and I have to do it. It is that we, as we lay hold of him and follow him in obedience, trust him. I will contend.

Don't you love it when you hear somebody in prayer pouring out their heart to God when they get to that level and that place where they're really saying, God, oh God, do as you've said, Lord. Come and contend. For the battle is the Lord's and he will not lose it.

I think at this time of year, just how difficult sometimes it is in family life. And I love to take and apply the promises of God into there because that's a place of hope and that's a place of security and that's a place of strength and that's a place where we can stand our ground just like Ephesians chapter six says, having done all, stand, leave it in his hands. So God gave to them, not only the fact that he has a plan, but there are many, many promises, are there not, that apply even to us today.

It is the Lord who goes before you. Well, that means I can step out knowing that he'll go before me. And maybe you're thinking about Christmas and the debt load and all the struggles and all the bits and pieces.

Where will the resources come from to meet those needs in 2011? It is the Lord who goes before you. Oh, we have so much to be thankful for, for the one who faithfully fulfills his promises. You think about the burdens and they bury us, don't they? But oh, when we turn our eyes to the word of God, it's full of hope and it's full of him.

And that's the second thing that we see here in verse eight. He will be with you, Moses says. Not only that he goes before you.

You know, I used to love to play soccer and I used to love to play with a fella called Trevor May because he was nine feet tall and three feet wide. And I played the position right behind him. And it felt so good when big Trevor was there.

And when I think about the Lord goes before you, it's not a problem for him to clear the way. How about it? The verse doesn't stop there. The verse goes on to say, he will be with you.

Oh, it's nice to know that he's out in front. But oh, my friends, just think about this word. He will be with you.

Yeah, but there's all, no, but he will be with you. Isn't that exactly what we want? His presence. And isn't it exactly the same thing that is repeated to Joshua? Joshua, in Joshua chapter one, be strong and courageous.

And God says, I'll never leave you. I'll be with you. You know, folks, I'm not a Hebrew scholar, but you can check this out.

Those of you who are taking the Hebrew class, you can check it out with Rabbi Jeremy. There is just a comma between the end of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Joshua. It's the end of the life of Moses and the beginning of the public ministry of Joshua.

And there's not even a period in there. It's just a comma. Because God has a plan.

And he has his promises for us and his presence with us. He not only goes before, but he goes with. I was telling Brad the other day, one of the people that I have loved from church history is a character called D.L. Moody.

He was not an educated man. In fact, he said Jerusalem in two syllables. So you can try that sometime, just for fun.

Had a grade four education and reached hundreds of thousands of people for Jesus. But you know, he had a singer called Sankey. And one day, Sankey sang a hymn, a glorious hymn before Moody preached.

And afterwards, this man came up to Sankey and said, that's the second time I've heard you sing that song. And he said, well, I've only sang it once in this series of meetings. He said, no, you were a Union soldier in the Civil War.

And on guard duty one night, you sang out that hymn all alone in the middle of nowhere. And as a soldier of the Confederacy, I had you in my sights. But as you sang that song, I knew there's no way I could pull the trigger.

I'll go with you. I'll be there. That's exactly what it is, isn't it? His presence in the middle of all the busyness and all the rest.

Could it be this morning that some of us just need that fresh touch of the presence of God? We look back at verse eight in Deuteronomy 31. He'll be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Do not fear or be dismayed. There's the power of God with the presence of God. His power at work.

And all friends, I just remind you, Satan is a defeated foe. And all of the fears and the struggles and all of the things and the what ifs, they all fall into that category that God has enough power. To change every single one of them.

It's limitless, isn't it? It provides us with hope and strength and grace and his healing touches, just so that we can step on with him. God's power to me is absolutely an amazing thing. I remember in the early 1990s, Dr. Billy Graham going to Moscow to hold an evangelistic series of meetings.

After the Berlin Wall had fallen, after communism, as some of us would remember it, had come crashing down, the meetings were called just one single word, revival. Can't say it in Russian, sorry. 14 trains every night came into Moscow from all over the place.

Just to hear the gospel. And one night, the Red Army Choir sang. You know what they sang? Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

And every evangelical preacher in the place was standing there weeping. And one of them said this, leaning over to speak to Billy Graham himself, he said, what a thing it is. These are the enemies who persecuted the church, who sought to bring to nothing the gospel.

And here they are singing. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. And can I ask you just a little question before I kind of wrap things up a bit? If Jesus was to come in the next five days before this year ends, or in one of the 365 days of 2011, would you be ready to say, my eyes have seen the glory? I'm ready.

There's nothing in between. You know, we have all of these great things that verse eight pours out for us, but I want to just read two other verses because there's one potential problem with all of this. God's side of this is absolutely marvelous, but there's one potential problem.

Let me just read verse 16 and 17. And the Lord said to Moses, behold, you're about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise up and whore after foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering.

And they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day. And I will forsake them and hide my face from them.

And they'll be devoured and many evils and troubles will come upon them so that they will say in that day, have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us. You see the potential problem? God knew that even knowing all these things, his people had it in their hearts to turn away from him. And the problem is still the same today, isn't it? The same in us.

Our own hearts need to know that closeness with God. And oh, my friends, as I close out the message this morning, should we not also think as we close out this year, Lord, I wanna be faithful to you. I want you to fill my heart with your presence, your power.

I don't wanna be tossed about anymore. One poet put it this way, I challenge you. I challenge you now at this crisis hour to take up your cross in the savior's power.

Oh, do something worthy for God and man. Come sacrifice all for the savior's plan. I challenge you now when the need is great.

I challenge you now when the hour is late. Remember how brief is your life's short span. Oh, do something worthy for God and man.

When you see the cross of the son of God, when you see the martyrs who shed their blood, when you are your record of living scan, what have you to offer? What have you ever suffered for God and man? Gladden your savior's heart, share his burden and do your part. Prove to him that your love is true and the price is worth paying to give and to do. Come do something worthy for Jesus now.

Come finish your crying for his thorn-pierced brow. Don't shun the cross, but complete his plan. It's now or it's never for God and for man.

Let's pray. Father, just in the quietness of this moment, we can face the coming days in all of the unknown because God has a plan and he's given his promise to go before us and he's given his presence to go with us and he's given his power to dwell within us by the Holy Spirit, but we must also do our part to live a surrendered life and if you're here this morning and struggling with some things, could I just encourage you to surrender them at the cross and take instead the fullness of the Holy Spirit and walk on into the future, not in fear, but in fellowship with the living God. Now, Father, as we bow in your presence, we thank you for your word and we thank you for your promise and oh God, would you continue to equip us as your people to strengthen and to help us, to minister to every single one who is here from your goodness and your grace.

And Lord, add your blessing to this, your word in each of our hearts this day, in Jesus' name, in God's people's sin, amen. Let's stand together as we close. Look at that, it's one minute after 12.

Is it? It's 12 on Brad's Apple iPhone and they're never wrong. So there's the first miracle after Christmas, the preacher finished on time. We're going to just ask the Lord's benediction.

I want to say some elders and the pastoral staff will be here at the front if you need prayer for anything. You step on after the benediction and come and we'll pray together. It's important to walk in the fullness and the nearness of the Lord.

And now, Father, we ask that you would add your blessing to each life that is here, from the youngest to the oldest. And that you would keep us in your grace, Father. Fill us with your spirit so that as we step from this place, we can indeed go, knowing the depth of your care and the wonder of your love.

The love of God the Father, the fellowship and salvation of God the Son, and the great enabling of God the Holy Spirit be upon each one of us every day of this week and every day of the coming new year. For it is in Jesus' name that we ask it. Amen.

And God bless you, Glencairn. We love you.

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