

Looking

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 0 0] being addressed in this 8th chapter of Deuteronomy here is of the children of Israel coming towards the end of their time in the wilderness. It takes quite a long time for them to sort of get to the final stage. But we have, you know, in the book of Numbers there's quite a jump suddenly around chapter 20 or thereabouts when suddenly after all the time and the early wanderings in the wilderness at chapter 20 there's suddenly a huge chronological leap and they're now looking at travelling up the east side of the Dead Sea going through the land of the Edomites and so on. And in Numbers 21 we've got their battles with Sihon the king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan and so they've had those fights now and then they've now redistributed and apportioned their lands as they were, the lands of the Amorites and the king of Bashan and so on. They've been distributed and apportioned now amongst the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh and now that the promised land as it were although it was only originally conceived of as being west of the Jordan has as it were come eastwards. It has almost as it were come out to meet them where they are because now part of the tribes of Israel have got their inheritance east of the Jordan. So it's like the Lord is coming out to meet them with his promise, with his inheritance where they are. But here they are as it were poised on the very brink of entering the promised land. There's a lot of chapters still to go, a lot of preparation still to be made. But the point is that by this stage in their journey and with all the battles they fought and the victories they've won, the Israelites have in short become accustomed to winning. They have become accustomed to the Lord always giving them the victory and making sure they defeat their enemies and entering into their inheritance and their promises and so on. And their greatest danger now is that they forget the source and the cost of their protection and preservation and their victories. There is, as the phrase goes, you know, no such thing as a free lunch.

Somebody's always paying for it somewhere down the line. And if you think about what has been required in order to give the Israelites this success and this inheritance the Lord has laid up for them, then think about it first of all. In order even to bring them out of Egypt, Egypt, the Lord had to send the ten plagues which devastated the superpower that Egypt was. He brought the Israelites out. When they were trapped against the Red Sea, he parted the Red Sea so that they could go through on dry land. He brought manna from heaven. He brought quails. He brought water from the rock. He gave them victory when they were so few in number than just a bunch of runaway slaves against professional soldiers and armies and kings that were accustomed to conquering. And somehow the Israelites beat them again and again and again. How did this happen? Not because the Israelites had strength of character or military expertise or because, you know, they just knew which rock to tap in the wilderness. No, the Lord intervened. He overruled his own laws of nature again and again and again and again. Plague after plague after plague in Egypt. Parting the Red Sea, then closing it again over the Egyptians. Raining down manna from heaven every single day except on the

Sabbath days all the way through until he actually crossed the Jordan and entered the promised land. It never failed. He never failed to provide for them. But to do that, he is intervening in his own laws of nature. He is upsetting, as it were, the balance of nature. And that doesn't happen without a cost. There is always cause and effect. There is always balance and imbalance in that sense. And if there is a cost being born to give them victory, who is bearing it? Well, in some cases, the other hapless nations against whom the Israelites come. But then they have raised themselves up against the Lord, the true God, by serving other gods and so on. But also, if there is a cost in the subverting, we might say, of God's holy laws and nature and environment, it is born by him. If there is a cost in the bloodshed of the nations that the Israelites are given victory over, that cost is born in a very real sense by the giver of life.

It is the Lord himself who causes their victories. The Lord himself who brings them by supernatural means to where they are. And that cost is born by somebody who is not them, not by the Israelites themselves. And that is what this chapter is about. The fact that remembrance is bound up with gratitude and humility and solemnity. There is a sense in which, if you were to roughly divide the first part of it, you see from verse six backwards, verses one to six, the Israelites are being encouraged to look back to the wilderness and to be instructed from their experience in the wilderness, to learn from it. And then from verse seven onwards in the next section, they are being encouraged to look forward into the promised land and to be instructed in advance by the good things they are going to enjoy and what they've got to guard against. So the Lord is encouraging them to look back and say, look, this is how I led you, this is how I protected you and provided me. This is what I'm going to do now. There are things to be learned from both of these features, both of these occurrences. But the common theme, the common denominator running through it all is the Lord and his presence and his provision for them. Remembrance is bound up with gratitude. Where there is gratitude, there will be humility. Where there is a recognition of our need to be humble, there will be solemnity. A recognition of what we owe to the one who has provided it for us. And by extension, the opposite of that, forgetfulness.

He speaks a certain frivolity, shallowness. Ah, yeah, we can do it. We like eat, drink, for tomorrow we die. Yeah, just take what's given and just enjoy it. It doesn't matter because who knows what the future is going to be, this kind of shallow frivolity. It's live for the moment, never think about tomorrow and so on, which in turn bespeaks pride. Yeah, I can do what I want. I, me, I'm the center of the universe. Frivolity and pride, all of which are the children of ingratitude.

[7:07] And so there's no one to whom we owe these things. No one to whom we have cause to take it. That's I, God, I worked hard, I earned the money to buy these things, why shouldn't I enjoy them?

But as we see, if we turn to page there, at verse 18, I shall remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get well, that he may establish his covenant, which he swore unto thy fathers as it is this day. His covenant that he established with them and with those who went before them, he is renewing that day, I would suggest to you, he is desiring to renew to us, even this day. Forgetfulness bespeaks frivolity, pride, and gratitude.

But far from being a, just a sort of passive, dry exhortation to just reminisce, look back and be nostalgic about, oh yeah, the wilderness, how the Lord brought us through, well that was good, well that's that, you know, that's the past, never mind the past, and yeah, we've got the future to look forward to it, never mind about the wilderness and how the Lord brought us through it. It's not just about a looking back and a sort of encasing everything in a fixed kind of dry sepia photograph, saying well that was the past, that was then. Rather what we see in this chapter is that we see that it is actually filled with action words, doing words, I suppose if you're going to use the dry school group, school room temp, verbs are running throughout this chapter. Action words, first of all if we think of those associated when ascribed to the Lord. What do we have, even in verse one we've got command, swear, there's this authority and this commitment, this sacred commitment that he is swearing to the children of Israel and he will protect and provide them. They are going to possess the land which the Lord swear unto your fathers. Command and swear, authority and solemnity and sacred commitment, that's all there, that's just verse one. How he led, humble, prove, know this is what he wants to do with them, to always be the one to guide them, to let them see the nature of their relationship with them, to prove them, to know what is in their hearts. How he humbled them, suffered in the sense of a love, then to hunger. He fed them, he would know what was in their hearts and know that man doesn't live by bread alone. Then we switch into present text, verses four and verse seven.

Chaseth as a man chaseth the son, he bringeth death, verse seven, the Lord bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, fountains of death, and so on. And then in verse 10, here we've got this one, he has given the Lord what he had given unto them. There in verse 10 we see how the promised land is spoken of as though it's already a done deal, as though it's already been possessed by them and yet technically it hasn't. You know they haven't actually got in there yet, they haven't actually taken ownership of it yet, but it's already spoken of as done and dusty, because the Lord has said it, and he's brought them this far, and he's not going to turn back now. It's as though it is already accomplished, given. Again, verse 11, verse 40, command, brought, verse 15, led, brought, verse 16, fed, humble, prove, do thee good. Verse 18, giveth, establish, swear, that sacred commitment again. Verse 19, testify.

And then only in verse 20 do we have that slight little word of threat, that if they won't enter into and reaffirm this relationship with the Lord, then they shall experience his destruction, his triumph, like the nations round about, which the Lord destroyeth before your face. And why are they destroyed?

[11 : 08] Because they have not the Lord. They have sought their other gods. There's nothing particularly noble or unique or special about, you know, Israelite blood or descendants from Abraham. Jesus himself said, you know, God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. So there's nothing unique in their sort of racial ancestry or in their political or national identity. It is the presence or absence of the Lord, which dictates their victory or lack of it. And the worshipping of false gods means that the other nations get destroyed when they come face to face with the power of the true God. And this is the message that if they insist on going the same way, if they insist on embracing these false gods, they all go the same way as these other nations. Because they're all God's verbs, they're all God's verbs ascribed to him in this chapter. And all verbs are providing, protecting, leading, teaching, guiding, shepherding. It's all about what the Lord desires to do for them, to do them good with authority, with solemnity, with protection. This is what the Lord desires for them.

And now if we look at those verbs ascribed, doing words, action words, ascribed to the children of Israel. Back again to verse one. Observe, do, live and multiply, go in, possess.

They're verbs of strength and obedience and blessing. What the Lord desires to do, that they possess. They go in, they multiply, they live, they do. It's all the life that he gives them.

Remember, remember, verse two, remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these four years in the wilderness to prove thee, and to know whether thou wouldst keep his commandments.

So, Lord, keep and remember. Verse five, consider, reckon, you know, examine, thou shalt consider in thine heart. There is a man chasing of his son, so the Lord chasing of thee. You've got a hard time from the Lord. It's not because he doesn't love you. It's not because he hates you. It's because there's a man chasing of his son. He's seeking to teach, to direct us for our good.

[13 : 26] Consider, consider. Verse six, keep, walk, fear, of sense, of being mindful of God's great power. Keep his commands, walk in his ways. Fear him, and also he enjoy the good. Verse nine, likewise, eat, not lack.

Dig, dig, out of the hills. Big brats out of the hills. Verse 10, bless. I shall bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Verse 11, forget not. And then again, this keeping of that which he hath given them. All the good things he desires them to have. Forget not the Lord thy God in not keeping his commandments. Verse 13, there is this future promise of multiplication. When thy herds and thy flocks multiply, thy silver and gold is multiplied. All that thou hast is multiplied. Then thy heart be lifted up. Now there's all these verbs and these things that they mustn't do. What they mustn't enter into.

Mustn't forget. And again at verse 19, forget, walk, serve, worship. All these false gods. Worshipping false gods, serving false gods, walking in the ways of false gods, forgetting the true God. What happens if they do that? They perish. Verse 19. Rather, verse 18, we have this ultimate verb, thou shalt remember.

All these doing words. All these action words. So many from the Lord. So many for the children of Israel. This then is a dynamically interactive chapter. There's both sides involved in it. The father and the children.

The God and those whom he has brought under his care. Lots of action words and promises and warnings from the Lord. And lots of potentially positive responses from the Israelites. Until the very end.

[15 : 40] If they should neglect him in their pride and stupidity. Now remember that despite the fact that might seem surprising in a thanksgiving service that this chapter doesn't actually mention the word thanksgiving at all, per se. It is not here explicitly mentioned as we see in this chapter. But remembrance is itself inextricably bound up with gratitude. With humility. With solemnity. It is forgetfulness that is likewise expressed in ingratitude, pride and frivolity.

And if you think about it. That's one of the distinctions of one who is converted to know the Lord. Born again to know the Lord. It is that they remember the Lord. When they wake up in the morning. They begin the day with the Lord because they remember the Lord. And at the end of the day, they remember the Lord and how he has brought them through and all that he has provided for them.

They recognize that all they receive is from him. It is the hallmark of one who is a worldling in their heart. As well as their behavior that they forget the Lord. No thought of the Lord except maybe on the Lord's day. Maybe outwardly in church and maybe if somebody's reading the Bible or something.

But really, no. Their life doesn't actually feature much of the Lord because they forget. They forget because their life is all about them. And all of them put the other in. And they forget how much the Lord has already invested of his own input into those lives.

forgetfulness is ingratitude. Remembrance is itself inextricably bound up with gratitude.

[17 : 26] What we have here in this chapter is we could say three things. You could make umpteen different points out of it, no doubt, but it tends to be with some people traditional to have sort of three main points in any kind of sermon or address or whatever. So let's take three things out of it here.

We have in this chapter a looking back with gratitude. We have a looking forward with hope.

And we have a looking up with expectation. And that is not simply what the children of Israel encourage to do. It is that which would apply to all of us. And especially in this day and age.

You know, this, uh, to me, to my mind, a wonderful providence that our own branch of the church now is appointed next Wednesday as a national day of prayer and fasting and thanksgiving. That we turn to the Lord with prayer. That we turn to the Lord to intercede for our nation. That we are taking a responsibility as a church for the whole nation to pray for the whole nation because there is need. There is need that we give thanks to God for what he has done. There is need that we submit ourselves under his rule, that we implore the Lord and intercede for our land and our nation, which has been dwelling in the depths of darkness, turning away from the light of the world. So we ourselves also need to be looking back with gratitude and forward with hope and up with expectation. If we think on the outworkings of God's grace for the children of Israel, we see, for example, that they're looking back with gratitude is something they are constantly encouraged to do as they go on in their national life. Time and again, there's a member of the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, remember the Lord who delivered you, and so on. And you know, when Samuel sets up the rock Ebenezer in chapter 7 of 1 Samuel, verse 12, then Samuel took a stone, set it between Mizpah and Shem, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying,

Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. He wasn't just wandering along board and thinking, oh, there's a nice rock, I think I'll stick that up and put some oil on it and give it a fancy name. No, what is the context of that rock, Ebenezer? If we turn back to the beginning of 1 Samuel 7, we see there that the Israelites, having received back the Ark of the Covenant, which they had previously mistakenly regarded as some kind of magic talisman, which if they carried it into battle, they were bound to be victorious. And we know from the early chapters of 1 Samuel, the opposite was the case. Because they put this superstitious veneration on what was basically a thing, a created thing, which, albeit under God's instruction, he had taught, he told them to make and to create. There was no magical power in the box itself.

[20 : 27] But they treated it as though it was. Of course they lost. The Philistines redoubled their efforts, and they took extra courage so they wouldn't be defeated. They captured the Ark. They had disastrous consequences for themselves. But of course then, the Israelites got it back.

And they had to not fall into the trap of again treating it with superstitious veneration. So what do we find in chapter 7 of 1 Samuel? We find Samuel saying to all the house of Israel, if you do return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you. And prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only. And he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel, they put away Balaam and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. Now the Balaam, that's the plural of Baals, there were lots of different Baal gods that they worshipped. But for the most part, most of the Baal gods were about fertility and fruitfulness.

The Ashtaroth gods tended to be more feminine goddesses, more concerned with human fertility, and also with sex, and all this other aspect of it. And if you think about it, the richness and fruitfulness of the land, which created wealth and riches, and sex on the other hand, so money and sex, you know, are pretty much the same obsessions as fallen human nature has had from the fall right through to the present day. Human nature doesn't change that much. So whilst they would have worshipped gods that they had made, and that they had invented out of their own minds, and given their sin and their lust, basically a religious expression, which people wouldn't tend to do so much nowadays, it is the same basic drive. It is the same basic sin and distraction that most in each generation are guilty of, the desire for money and power and sex. Now what Samuel is saying is put away these things. I mean go and live like a monk and live in total poverty, but it does mean that if you put these things behind you, devote yourself completely to the Lord and put Him first, then He will give you all the things that you thought you desired, but in a sanctified context. He will bless to you the good things that He desires to give you. He will take away the twisted and perverted and corrupted means whereby people try to grab money, power and wealth themselves and abuse the gift of love that the Lord intended. And all these things the Lord will take and sanctify, put away the false gods from among you. And the children of

Israel did put away Balaam and Ashton off and serve the Lord only. And after they served the Lord, then Samuel took a sucking lamb, offered it, verse 9, for a burnt offering, holy to the Lord. He cried to the Lord for Israel, the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered against, thundered with a great thunder that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them. And they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and smote them until they came under Bethkar.

Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shem and called the name of the Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. It is in the context of victory and beginning to win again because they had devoted themselves wholly to the Lord. And just as the Lord gave them victory, then over the Philistines, as he had in the past, over the Amorites and the Moabites and the Ammonites and whoever else came against them, he continued to give them victory whenever they covenanted to turn themselves back again to the Lord, bring away the false gods and devote themselves wholly to them.

[24 : 30] God doesn't change. That is what we read in Malachi chapter 3 verse 6. I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. We wanted a New Testament expression for that same sentiment. We can't do better than find it in Hebrews 13 at verse 8. Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and forever. God's call to purity of life and purity of devotion for him and for him alone doesn't change. He doesn't say, oh well now we know better than the Bible. Now we can just accept these things that once would have been shocking or abhorrent or an abomination or whatever. No, we can just accept all these things now because we're so much more advanced and sophisticated. No, we're not. Human nature hasn't changed.

Human depravity hasn't changed. And you can be absolutely certain God has not changed. Nor have his requirements. We are called upon them to look back with gratitude to see how the Lord has delivered his people time after time after time, whenever they turn and devote themselves to him. This is one reason why I had such encouragement and hope about next week's National Day of Prayer. It is a wonderful commitment by our own branch of the church which I hope will be widely taken up and which I hope may be the first of many. We are to look back with gratitude. But also because God does not change. We saw how remember in the first six verses of this chapter they were looking back to the wilderness and being instructed, being taught by that. Also from verse 7 onwards they were to look forward into the promised land that they hadn't actually got yet, but were expecting to receive. We are likewise to look forward with hope.

Because God doesn't change, we can be certain that what he has promised, he will deliver. We think of what Elizabeth, for example, when she was expecting John the Baptist and Mary comes to visit her and she greets her. And one of the things she says to Mary in Luke chapter 1 verse 45 is, Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were promised her from the Lord. And we can of course change the gender as appropriate to that. Blessed is whoever believes, because there will be a performance of the Lord of all the things that he has promised. And if we believe and trust in him, we will likewise receive. Believe it and you will receive it. Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were promised her from the Lord. Now we might think just like when the Israelites were told her from the Lord.

We're poised on the brink of the promised land. The cynic might say, Ah yeah, but wait a minute. We're not there yet, are we? We're not across Jordan yet. Yes, we may have beaten the Amorites and may have bypassed the Edomites and beaten Og, the king of Bashan and all these other people, but come on.

Here's Jericho and all the Canaanites and all these other nations. Seven nations mightier than us. What are we going to do? We haven't actually got it yet, have we? We don't actually see it delivered yet to our hand. This is still under the New Testament, still under the Gospel. Same principle, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 7. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We trust and believe in what we do not yet see. On the basis of what we have seen, God always do in the past. We walk by faith, not by sight. As Peter puts it, chapter 1, verse 8 of 1 Peter, Whom having not seen, ye love. In whom though now ye see him not yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. We are able to love the Lord whom we have never set eyes on. Because we trust and believe in what he has done in the past, which we have seen. And what we believe he will do in the future because he has promised it. And we trust and believe in what he has said. Because we walk by faith and not by sight. Again, the context of what Peter says there, we go back to verse 5 and 1 Peter 1.

[28 : 57] We were kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Ready to be revealed in the last time. Hasn't been revealed yet, but we expect and know that it will be. Wherein ye greatly rejoice.

Though now for a season, if need be, yearn heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith be much more precious than a gold that perisheth. Though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love. In whom though now ye see him not yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the airing fairies, the fulfillment of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. We look forward in hope because we walk by faith and not by sight. But also, thirdly, we are to look up with expectation. All the fulfillment of God's promises are not to be found nearly in this world.

Not nearly in the flesh and blood world that we inhabit. We are not Sadducees. Good as God is to us in this world. Blessed as he is to his children here, providing richly for them.

But this is not the fulfillment of it all. This is not. Even though the promised land, physically as it were, came eastwards to meet the Israelites where they were, so that the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in one sense, had their inheritance before they even crossed the Jordan. In one sense, we already taste and see that God is good before we even enter into glory. But this is not the fulfillment. We are then to be looking up with expectation. And this is what we read that Jesus says to his disciples. When these things begin to come to pass, Luke 21, verse 28. When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Now, he's not saying, oh, when everything's going great, well, you're raking in the money, and everything's just going swimmingly for you, and you're getting rich, and you're getting blessed, and everything's going good, then you know it's time for the Lord to come back. No, he's talking about the midst of tribulation, suffering, difficulty. Verse 25. There shall be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and upon the earth the stress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves rolling, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, and say, oh, when you see the Son of Man, and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand, so like what is ye. When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

[32 : 07] Verily I said you, this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

When these things begin to come to pass, then look up your salvation, Lord and I. Now, as we touched on in the past, of course, there's more than one way to understand the term generation.

It can mean the human race. It can mean a particular, like the generation of Adam, and the things that people that descended from him by natural generation. It can mean a particular nation or people like the nation of the Jews, that generation.

It can also mean a period of time, 20 or 30 years, as we would understand it, between a parent and a child's lifetime, and so on. There are different ways of understanding it, but in one sense, every generation it is true for.

Because we will not all pass away till some of us have beheld the Lord in his glory. Whether or not he comes back here, we may be summoned to him. Now, that's not to say, ah, yeah, you're twisting it now.

[33 : 10] There will come a day when it is fulfilled. The human race will not have failed. All that Adam's generation will not have passed away before the Lord comes back. We may live to see it, and then we will be changed even if we don't sleep.

We may not live to see it. We may stand before the Lord at that last judgment before he comes back. It doesn't matter. The point is that we be ready to receive him when he comes or when he calls for us.

We are to be looking up with expectation. Remember how it says of John the Baptist that when he was preaching just before Jesus' ministry began, we read in chapter 3, verse 15 of Luke, it says, As the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not.

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water. But one mightier than I cometh a latch, and of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

In other words, if we were to use modern kind of colloquialism, I'd say the people were in expectation. They wondered about John, whether he's the Messiah, and not John said, You've seen nothing yet.

[34 : 24] Whatever you think I'm doing, you ain't seen nothing yet. When he comes, he's going to be so much greater than me, so much more powerful than me. I'm not worthy to undo these shoes.

But there was nonetheless this sense of expectation. The people have this sense of expectation. They are looking for the Messiah.

They're looking upwards. They are sincerely desiring that God would work in the midst of their mission. They at least are that wonderful now. Is that true of us?

Is that true of our mission? We are looking for the Lord. And it ought to be part of our gratitude to the Lord. That thankful as we are for what he has done in the past.

We desire to see him work again in the present. We desire to see him bring in his kingdom for the future. But we wish, we pray, we desire that he would begin to work now in the present.

[35 : 27] We have to look up with expectation. Because the Lord's promise is that he will not let his people go out of his hands.

Zion said, Isaiah 49, verse 14, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb, Yea, they may forget.

Yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. Thy walls are continually before me.

It is not possible to gouge the lines out of your hand. It is not possible to pluck those lines out of one's hand. Jesus himself says in John 10, verse 27, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

[36 : 39] I and my Father are one. It is great blessing. It is a source of great gratitude to be held in the hand of God.

This is our protection. This is our stability. This is our great blessing. And we know that the Lord continues to speak to his people, not because of the mouthing words or lips of any individual servant in a pulpit anywhere, or preachers or ministers.

Or if you read a line of the Bible and say, Oh yes, that's an interesting portion or interesting passage. It's not just the voice of men that speak in pulpits.

It may be what goes through our ears and over our heads. But when the Lord begins to do business with a soul, when the Lord intervenes in one's life, who they hear speaking through the passage, the particular words, they hear the Lord himself speak.

Not because of any eloquence in the heart of any man, or any particular passage, or it is the Lord speaking through his word. This is what he says. My sheep hear my voice.

[37 : 52] They don't hear the voice of the man. They don't hear the voice of the servant. They don't hear the voice of Spurgeon, or Knox, or Melville, or any other individual. They hear the voice of Christ. That is what changes hearts.

That is what brings the dead forth out of the tomb. That is what changes nations. My sheep hear my voice. Others may hear the voice of ministers, or preachers, or individual servants, but my sheep hear my voice.

And they follow me. And I give them eternal life. They never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

And we know the Lord will never let us go, because he never has yet. And he is the one who does not change. That is what this passage is about.

Looking back with gratitude. Looking forward with hope, and looking up with expectation. That is this thankfulness in this passage.

[38 : 55] It is what Deuteronomy is saying to the Jews. It is what Scripture is saying to us, the Gentiles, in the present, because it is the living word of the living God.

And we have cause to learn from the past. We have cause to be hopeful for the future. And in the present, now, tonight, we have cause, indeed, and always, to give thanks.

Let us pray.