

How the People of God Accomplish the Mission of God by the Word of God Deuteronomy 31:1-32:43

Intro: Illst: John Bunyan is one of the most beloved authors in English speaking history. He is the author of the book *Pilgrim's Progress*. Only the Bible surpasses the sales of his book. After Bunyan's his life was anything but easy. He struggled with assurance of salvation, his wife's death, raising six children with one daughter who was blind, poverty and the call to preach when the law forbade it. He was a Baptist who was part of the non-conformist movement who disagreed with the Church of England.

Bunyan remarried in 1660 but not long after he remarried he was arrested for preaching without a license in 1661. His new wife was pregnant with their first child and due to the stress of his imprisonment and poverty she gave birth to a stillborn baby. While in prison, Bunyan made shoelaces to provide income for his family. The authorities would have set him free if he agreed to quit preaching but he wouldn't agree. Bunyan said, "*O I saw in this condition I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his Wife and Children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do [preach].*"

Bunyan spent 12 years in prison and during this time he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Three hundred years later it is still in print.¹ Only the Bible has out sold it. John Bunyan loved the Scriptures. It was life for him. Listen to his love of the Scriptures:

"The Scriptures carry such a blessed beauty to the soul that has faith in them, that they take the heart and captivate the soul that believes them giving a love and liking for them and a belief in all the things that are written in the law and the prophets, as well as hope in God that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

To those that rightly believe the Scripture, the promises or threats have more power to comfort or discourage than all the promises or threats of everyone in the world. This was why the martyrs of Jesus paid so little attention to the promises of their enemies . . . [who offered] them the great things of the world or [their] threatening that they would rack them, hang them, burn them. None of these could defeat Christ's martyrs.

*Read the Bible, and read it again, and do not give up on understanding something of the will and mind of God . . . [for] . . . Old truths are always new to us, [because] they come to us with the smell of heaven on them."*²

- **Transition: Have you ever smelled fresh bread?** I love to smell fresh bread. This morning let's linger over our text like it is a loaf of fresh homemade bread and enjoy the aroma of heaven in the word of God. There will be nothing new this morning but my prayer this morning is that the old truths have the aroma of soul warming, soul feeding fresh bread of heaven.
- **Read Deuteronomy 31:1-13**
- **Setup the text:**
 - The mission was that God began a work all the way back in Egypt where He used Moses to lead His people out of slavery by signs and wonders. God gave them His laws, rules and statutes at Mt. Sinai but soon after that on the plains of Moab about where they are standing right now (in our story) they lacked faith in God to lead them into the Promised Land. They grumbled and complained against Yahweh, their covenant God and for their lack of faith He told them that that generation would not enter the Promised Land but the next generation would. So they wandered in the wilderness for forty years until those who could not enter died and now Moses has them back to where they started forty years earlier.

¹ Michael and Sharon Rusten, *The One Year Christian History*, pp. 98-99.

² *The Riches of Bunyan: Selections from the Writing of John Bunyan*, pp. 45-46.

- **Now they ready to complete the mission—enter and take possession of the Promised Land.**
- **So now they are standing on the border of the Promised Land again.** Moses had preached a really long sermon to them that went through all of the law and how it was to be applied after they went into the land.
- **However, Moses was not going into the land.** Moses sinned and his punishment was that he would not be able to enter the Promised Land.
- **So here they were ready to go into the land but he was not going to lead them.**
 - How will they go on without him as their leader?
 - What would it look like?
 - God's people were sad, fearful and anxious about the future.
- **As the church, we find our story in Israel's story.**
 - Just like God's people were delivered from slavery in Egypt by the word of God from Egypt, God's people were given the word of God at Mt. Sinai, God's people rebelled and were in the wilderness for forty years and are now being drawn out of the wilderness to complete God's mission of being God's people in God's place under God's rule.
- **Last Sunday the point of the message was that *the DNA of God's mission is that the people of God accomplish the mission of God by the word of God.*** We looked at four things that helped us understand that.
- **This morning what I want to do is unpack that idea a little further by answering the question: *How?***
- What we learn from how Israel stayed on mission points to how we stay on mission.
- *How does the church (the people of God) accomplish the redemptive mission (Great Commission) of God by the word of God?*
- I think there are two things from this text that help us see how Israel moved forward. Remember we find our story in their story:
 1. Jesus leads His church to fulfill His redemptive mission by His word
 2. Jesus reminds His church to remain on mission with Him by His word

I. Jesus leads His church to fulfill His redemptive mission by His word (Deuteronomy 31:1-3)

- **Illst: READ Deuteronomy 31:1-3**
 - **There are often problems where there is a change in leadership.** We are seeing it our nation. We experience it in church too. Transition in leadership is a challenge.

There are two issues for Israel, in this text, as they move forward: leadership and mission.

- **With Moses dying and Joshua taking over can they trust him to lead the mission?**
 - After all Joshua is younger than Moses so how will they be able to take possession of the land with a young guy at the helm? Moses was older and more experienced and it seemed like he always knew what to do.
 - **Will it be a peaceful transition of power or will there be an uprising?** Good question! Do you know how nations had transition of leadership and power in those days? It was not uncommon to have a usurper try to grab leadership, a coup to over throw the government or a mass murder of the opposition to the position of power in order to eliminate all challengers. This was common in that day.
- **Here was Yahweh's answer . . . Deuteronomy 31:6-8**

Thinking about leadership, let's make some application: Remember we find our story in their story.

- **First: Godly leadership for God's people is very important. (Deuteronomy 31:1, 9-10, 24-25)**
 - **What kind of leader was Moses? Look at Deuteronomy 34:10-12.** At this point in the history of Israel when Deuteronomy was written the nation had not seen another leader in the class of Moses. He knew Yahweh "*face-to-face*". That is an amazing statement. It is one that we would all want said about us even if we do not lead. We want to know God in this personal kind of way like Moses did.
 - **A Godly leader is one who learns from God's word and leans on God's word.**
 - Moses' strength was **learning** from God and **living** with the people of God. Moses took what he learned from God and lived with God's people and disciplined them. He did not isolate himself. He trained others to lead. He appointed elders, Levites and priests. He taught them how to love and lead God's people.
 - **Godly leaders meet with God to learn from His word and live among the people of God (we do life together, in community).**
 - **More specifically Godly leaders spend time with Jesus in His word (the Bible) then do life in community with the church.**
 - Leaders spend time in prayer talking with and listening to Jesus by His Spirit and in His word.
 - Leaders live among the people of God, the church. Leadership is not isolating one's self but doing life in community with the people of God.
 - In **Acts 4:13**, after Peter preached with great power to the scribes and elders of Israel their response was, "*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*"
 - Spending time with Jesus is the most important thing a leader can do. [Godly leadership for God's people is very important.]
- **Second: Godly leadership for God's people is not important. (Deuteronomy 31:1-3)**
 - **What do I mean by this?** The key verse here is **v. 3**. We must put godly leadership in perspective. "*The strength of God's people has never been the man preaching; it has always been God's Word*"³ (Anthony Moore, Exodus 7:1-13). Pastors come and go, preachers come and go but God's word remains forever and it alone possesses the power to transform the church and its people—not the preacher.
 - **Leaders are flawed people and this is why we must put our faith in Christ and His words.** Christian leaders and pastors should strive to be like Christ but in the end they are still flawed, they are still sinful they still do not have the ability to transform your life. That power is found in the word of God.
 - **Because Christian leaders are flawed, does mean they get a pass in their leadership? NO.** No they do not get a pass. Just consider Moses.
 - **Illst:** Moses did not get a pass, **Deuteronomy 31:48-52.**
 - Leaders are accountable even though they are broken.
 - Sometimes a leader's brokenness is to the level that it costs them their leadership.
 - **So let's keep godly Christian leadership in its proper place: it is important but it is not ultimate.**

³ Anthony Moore, Sermon: *Signs and Wonders*, Ex. 7:1-13, Nov. 13, 2016, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas, <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/detail/signs-and-wonders/>.

- **Christian leaders call God's people to trust in Jesus and His word as they carry out the Great Commission.**
 - Deuteronomy 31:12-13 reminds me of how the Apostle Paul saw his ministry in Colossians 1:28, "Him [Jesus] **we** proclaim, warning **everyone** and teaching **everyone** with all wisdom, that **we** may present **everyone** mature in Christ."
 - Although Moses and Paul had a role as leaders to call God's people to fulfill the mission of God by the word of God it was not just their responsibility to see it completed—it was **everyone's responsibility**.
 - It was responsibility to be shared and to be passed along.
- **Jesus is the Ultimate Leader we follow as we carry out the Great Commission.**
 - Jesus is the True and Greater Moses who died not for His own sin but for the sin of His people.
 - Jesus as the True and Greater Moses did not die for His sin but instead paid for the sin rebellion and our rebellion of His own people. On the cross He took our punishment receiving the wrath of God for our sin of rebellion against Him. Then He was raised back to life after being dead in the tomb dead three days. He has set the captive free from slavery to sin's power and penalty; He took their sin and shame and nailed it to the cross. Jesus is our Leader who leads us into God's eternal dwelling.
 - Hebrews 3:1-6:
"Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope."
 - Hebrews 13:12-13
"So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured."
- **Friends we need Godly leaders today like never before.** We especially need them in the church but Godly leaders are not ultimate—Christ is ultimate. Leaders come and leader go but the word of God embodied in our Savior Jesus Christ remains forever and He will continually call His people to follow Him and fulfill the Great Commission.

II. Jesus reminds His church to remain on mission with Him by His word

A. First the Bad News:

- **Illst: Have you ever had someone ask you,** "Do you want the bad news or the good news first?" I don't know about you but I always ask for the bad news first. Let's just get it over with so we can move on.
- **The bad news for God's people as they carry out His mission—their rebellion.**
- **Look at what Moses said to the people.** Moses predicted failure.
 - Deuteronomy 31:16-18 . . .
 - Deuteronomy 31:27 . . .
 - **New leader same old song.** Deuteronomy 31 is the *prophetic-warning* but it is in prose and the song in Deuteronomy 32 is the *prophetic-warning* in poetry.
- **The prophetic-warnings of Deuteronomy 31-32 are a paradigm for our own hearts and lives.**

- **Illst:** The Geiko commercials . . . the latest one is the raccoons. “It is what you do.”
- **Application:** This really is a paradigm for us. If you are human then you are a sinner that runs from God or a Christian who drifts away from Jesus—it is what you do. That is what we do.
- **We drift from God. We drift from holding tightly to God’s word.**
 - We grow weary from the struggles of life and we drift.
 - Perhaps we become successful and we drift.
 - Perhaps we become anxious about circumstances in life and we drift.
 - Perhaps suffering comes into our lives and we drift.
 - Perhaps another person offends us and we drift.
 - It does not matter what the circumstances. There is always some reason we drift and believe me our hearts will find a reason. We are just prone to wander as the old hymn says. We are prone to wander when we are successful and prone to wander when we are hurt and prone to wander when we fail. We are just prone to wander.
- **Why do we wander? Why do we drift? (Remember their story is our story.)**
 - **We have a heart problem.** It was not just Israel that had a heart problem but it is us as well.
 - Let’s go back to **Deuteronomy 30:6**. Moses tells the people of Israel the solution but it also identifies the problem for rebellion and/or drifting from God. It is the heart needs circumcising.
 - This is a metaphor for what the issue is. The spiritual heart needs God to intervene and change it.
 - **For the non-Christian it means your heart is spiritually dead to God.** You do what you do because you love what you love and you do not love Jesus and this is why you sin. This is why you rebel against God or are just indifferent toward Him or just ignore Him.
 - **Although a Christian’s heart is not dead spiritually, his heart can grow cold toward God or hard toward God** for reasons I mentioned earlier and rebellion can occur.
- **God, by predicting failure and rebellion of His people, was teaching his people the condition of their hearts was the real problem.**
 - Listen to me . . . what you believe the problem is will determine your solution.
 - If you just think your problem is information then you will try to get more education.
 - If you think the problem is behavior then you will try to learn some strategies to improve your life.
 - However if you believe the issue is that you are broken because of your sin then you will call out to God to circumcise your heart with His word. You will beg Him to do in your heart what you can never do because He requires of you what you can never produce in your own strength—obedience to His word.
 - **Bottom line: Israel’s biggest struggle is our biggest struggle—idolatry.** *Idolatry is the root of all sin and therefore the solution of defeating all sin is getting to the heart of the issue with the gospel.* Our problem is that you and I tend to worship and serve other gods besides Jesus. So God’s goal is to continually call us back to worshipping, loving, fearing and trusting Jesus. Let me show you what I mean.
 - **Illst: Let’s say you struggle with work-a-holism.** You tend toward over work. You are burdened with your work. You bring your work home and it creates anxiety and stress on you and in your family.

- If you wanted to overcome this sin and you had a deficient definition of the nature of sin and a deficient definition of spiritual maturity you might think that problem is my behavior and in order to correct this change my behavior. I need to apply some principles to my life in order to change.
 - So to get better what I need to do is take one whole day off each week,
 - quit bringing work home with me and be with my family instead,
 - turn off your cell phone,
 - start each day with a quiet time every morning and read the Bible regularly.
 - All of these are good strategies but they do not get at the heart of why you work too much.
- **So if you come to me and you say, "I have a problem with work-a-holism can you help me?"** I am going to tell you fundamentally your problem is not work-a-holism. Fundamentality your problem is you are an idolater. The problem is your heart is worshipping an idol.
 - You are worshipping your work;
 - You are worshipping the financial security you receive from your work;
 - You might be worshipping your boss's approval that you receive from him when you work;
 - Whatever those issues are the fundamental problem is idolatry. You are worshipping, fearing, serving, loving something other than Jesus Christ;
 - The answer is you need to repent of your idolatry and you need to worship Jesus. This is how you fundamentally apply the gospel this sin. Then you need to believe the promises of the gospel that Jesus makes to you. So you read the Bible and where it says that Jesus takes care of the sparrows, if I clothe the lilies of the field, won't I take care of you? Don't worry about tomorrow. Seek first the kingdom of God and I will take care of your needs.
 - You need to repent of your sin and get your worship squared with Jesus and begin to worship, love, serve and fear Jesus and know that all of your needs for love, affirmation, material needs etc . . . will be met in Jesus or by Jesus.
 - Remember what the God was aiming at here. Moses predicted failure to prepare them, to teach them who they were and what their problem was. It was to cause them to fear God and seek Him to change their hearts and create in them what they could not produce.⁴
- **One final charge: What do you do when you fail? What do you do when there is no joy, just the pain of past transgressions!** *You continually go back to the gospel. You see God for who he is, make honest confession of sin, repent, stand on God's word for assurance of pardon and peace with God, receive instruction from God's word and bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Joy does **not only** comes from obedience but it also comes from recognizing that God loves you and has made a path back to Him. There is joy in knowing that He loves you and accepts you in spite of your sin. There is joy knowing that although He accepts you just as you are, He loves you enough to not leave you just as you are. It is humble seeds of joy but are seeds that lead to a greater harvest of joy once planted in the fertile ground of future grace.*

B. Ready for the good news? The good news is that God intends for His mission to be carried out by broken people.

⁴ I want to thank pastor Bob Thune for helping me make this application.

Our sin and brokenness, our lack of spiritual maturity and our failures does not keep us from joining God in His redemptive mission to see people come to faith in Christ. Look at:

- **Deuteronomy 31:27—He knew they were stubborn and rebellious**
- **Deuteronomy 31:23—but just a few verses earlier he commissioned Joshua and the people of Israel to go forward**
- All of **Deuteronomy 32** was about punishment on rebellious Israel in the future but that did not stop God from commissioning His people to go forward.
- **Deuteronomy 31:45-47—take heart, hold to the word of God and go forward.**
- **Our charge! Church—Take heart! Remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:28-29, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."²⁹ For this I [we] toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me [us]⁵."**

Conclusion: [Move to the table for the Lord's Supper]

A. In closing, one of the things we find in Deuteronomy are devices God gave Israel to help them remember and rehearse all that He had done to redeem them. He gave them the:

- Tabernacle (later the Temple)
- Sacrificial rites
- Feasts/festivals with three principle feasts
- Judges
- Levites & Priests
- Circumcision
- The covenant
- The Law (both written and spoken)
- **And now at the end of Deuteronomy God gives Israel one more thing—a song. Deuteronomy 32 is a song that is a song that is a *prophetic-warning*. It is a song that was sung against the people of Israel to warn them of the consequences of their rebellion and that even with this prediction and warning they will still rebel. They were to commit this song to memory to as a corrective and preventative means to remaining faithful to God BUT it did not work. A greater song had to be given.**

B. Jesus Christ is the Greater Song. Jesus fulfilled all of these Old Testament devices, which are but shadows of the Greater Song. However, God has still given the church devices or means for remembering and understanding our deliverance from slavery to sin and how Christ set us free. These devices are now filled with the light of the Greater Song—Jesus Christ and His gospel.

- None of the Old Testament shadows were bad but they lacked the power to change God's people from the inside out.
- The greatest thing God has given **US** is His Holy Spirit who circumcises our hearts by giving life to our dead hearts and now He transforms us from the inside out and by His Holy Spirit He continually calls us back to God's mission by God's word.
- **Consider How God reminds us of our mission through His word:**
 - We are created for community and God calls us into community with one another to *smell the aroma of Heaven* in His word.

⁵ I added the plural language in [brackets] to help us own what our calling is.

- We gather for worship every Sunday and in our gathering we:
 - **preach** the gospel,
 - **pray** the gospel,
 - we **read** the gospel
 - **sing** the gospel
 - **Deuteronomy 32 was a song but it was an unfinished song. The song is finished in Revelation 15:2-4, which is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 32. Listen to Revelation 15:2-4:**
*² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.⁶ ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!
⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*
 - **You see the devil has a song too. His song goes like this:**
*Oh, the devil's singing over me an age old song
That I am cursed and gone astray
If the penalty of sin is death, then death is mine
I hear him saying, "Cursed are the ones who can't abide. You cannot gain salvation."
Singing the first verse so conveniently over me
He's forgotten the refrain, Jesus saves
Jesus has redeemed you from the curse of your sin.⁷*
- We **preach, pray, read** and **sing** the gospel and this morning—we **see** the gospel!
 - God has given the church two ordinances that enable us to see the gospel. One we saw earlier, **baptism**, and now we see it in the **Lord's Supper**.

⁶ Those that are singing this song have conquered the beast but in Deut. 32 that was not so nor was it so in the remainder of the Old Testament, which was the Levites and prophets continually calling the people back to Yahweh and His word. This song is finished because Christ has overcome!

⁷ Adapted from Shane Bernard and Shane Everett, *Embracing Accusations*, Album: Pages, <http://www.songlyrics.com/shane-shane/embracing-accusation-lyrics/#YKWuYjxpV5j4dIQS.99>.