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### **Sermon Transcript: A Time to Remember**

I'm in a season of my life where I'm working on some really important big talks. Not the sermons; I've been doing that a long time. That's just part of the regular gig. I'm talking about I'm in that season where I have kids who are graduating. Somebody's always graduating from somewhere and going off somewhere else or trying to get a job here or transfer here or go here. I mean, they feel like big moments. It's time for dad to show up with a big speech, you know, something that's going to be real inspiring and just take all the years of parenting and wrap it up in one solid delivered moment. So now each of my four kids has had to sit through that awkward last hour together when we dropped them off at college. I don't really know exactly what I said to each of my kids, but I'm confident at least one of them has a weird awkward memory of dad in that last hour before we drove away. But it feels like a moment where we're at the end of one era. There's this new thing starting. You're going to have to go out on your own. And I just hope that I taught you everything you need to know. And I've reminded you of everything I need to remind you of.

That's precisely the kind of thing that Moses is going through in Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy literally means a second telling of the law or a second copy of the law. Moses is preparing the people to go into the promised land and he's not going with them, and he knows that. And so he's trying desperately to give them a good talk, one that's going to encapsulate all that they need to know.

### **The Choice of Leadership**

It's interesting that he starts off this talk in this first chapter of Deuteronomy with a "Hey, remember we got leaders involved," because before getting too far into all of this, Moses needs to remind them, look, you have a choice to make. You either need to be a leader or you need to pick a leader to follow. It's one of those two choices as you move forward at this time. And I think that is true for each of us. We have to decide: Are we a leader, or are we going to pick a leader to follow? Because if you don't pick either one of those, what happens is you just end up just following whatever randomness happens in your life. This happened, now I'll go this direction. And you will let just the tides and circumstances of life carry you along.

Now we live in an age where the tides and circumstances of life have been successfully monetized—down to your attention span is monetized and sold to people. And so you have to decide with what will you can muster: Who will I follow, or am I called to be a leader at this time in this moment? And that's the very first thing that Moses reminds the people of as he goes through this final big talk.

### **The Core Lessons of Moses**

As Moses goes through, he has several things over the course of Deuteronomy that he wraps up in this big talk.

#### **Exclusive Loyalty to God**

The first one is to say that this God that we know is worth your exclusive loyalty. Imagine being a person of faith and saying, "You know what, God? You're not worth my exclusive loyalty." I feel like I need to stand to the side to avoid the lightning bolt when I said those words, even though it was in

parody. Do you know that the idea that we would hold anything in this world as more worthy of your loyalty if we are part of this people of God is ridiculous? But it needs to be said out loud because, once again, the people left on their own will wander, as we are prone to wander. These types of lessons that Moses is giving the people are the same lessons that we try to remind one another of every Sunday as we come together for Sunday worship and prepare to go off into that land of Monday to Saturday. We need to be reminded of certain things, and one is that as we go forth, God alone is worth your exclusive loyalty.

#### The Law as a Gift

The second thing that Moses is going to remind the people of over all of Deuteronomy is this: and that is that the law is a gift. All of the laws and ordinances and commandments, they are not meant to oppress you. They are meant to set you free. God has not given us all of these rules because of anything that God needs; it's something that we need. A lot of these laws and ordinances and commandments, to be honest, that we read about in the Old Testament, they were specifically given to the people of Israel to help them set themselves apart from the common culture around them because that common culture will lead them away from the life that is life-giving. I don't think we live in such a very different world all these thousands of years later that the law, the rules, and the commandments that we talk about in this room are a gift to your days.

#### Cause and Effect

The third thing that Moses really wants to get across to people is that there's a little bit of a cause and effect when you don't follow these rules. It tends to be that as you follow the law of God, as you follow the way that God has taught us, that things turn out better—not always, but it tends to work better. Straying from that, thinking that your will and your thinking is so much more wise than anything that God has given to us, tends to lead to bad circumstances. It's not so much like God gives a rule and if you don't follow it, well, smack! It's really just trying to help you understand what is good and what works.

It's like when my kids were younger. I had one—we'll just say that I had only one of my kids that liked to question the rules that we gave. Let's pretend only one of them was like that. But I had one in particular who always wanted to parse it down to the smallest of details. "When you say this, does it mean that and into that?" So when they were very, very young, we told them, "Do not put your hand on the stove. You will get burned." And this young one wasn't so sure that was true. They did not understand how that might happen and thought, "You know what? I'll just test it out." So indeed, this brilliant child of mine walked up to a stove and with full intention put their hand on the stove. It was on. And they screamed in agony and we said, "We told you." Now, what we didn't say was that we gave you the rule, don't put your hand on the stove, and because you did, God burned your hand. God smit thee for thy disobedience! But the rule that we gave was there for a reason, so that they might have a better life, one in which their hands don't fry on a stove. They did not believe this was true, and they found out the hot way. We're not so different. We often forget that the law is given to us to protect us from some simple cause and effect.

#### **Worship and Community**

Moses goes on in Deuteronomy and through all of his speeches to the people, he also wants to tell them something which is an easy translation for us today, and that's that worship is central to your life. Throughout Deuteronomy, it will be affirmed again and again to the people that being present here in a regular habit of worship is essential to you knowing the fullness of life that God has intended for you. That was true thousands of years ago, and it remains true today.

And it's not just true because of what you need. There are days when you come here to worship and there is something that you need to receive for your Monday through Saturday life ahead—

something that needs healing, reassurance, or some grace. But sometimes you're here not for you. Sometimes what is so essential about you being in worship is you being here for the person sitting next to you so that we might be able to look around and see this great cloud of witnesses. I mean, can you imagine how different this worship experience would be if just Brandy showed up and just like, "Well, Brandy, you and me, here we go. We'll sing some songs and you're going to get a sermon." It's not just awkward; it's what's not intended. We're meant to worship in community. When we come together, we come for our own receipt, but we also come to give the blessing of our presence to one another to be the body of Christ together.

### **Justice and Remembrance**

There are two more things that Moses is going to tell the people in his great last set of speeches here in Deuteronomy. Trust me, I'm almost there. The difference between kids and adults is that the kids vocalize it, right? The adults are like, "Come on, pastor."

One of those things is that social justice and compassion are part of what the law demands of us. I know there's a lot of people who want to push back on that, but the truth is, read through Deuteronomy and see how many times those who are marginalized, those who are oppressed, those who are suffering are put into the front of the line. We're supposed to pay attention to that and respond to that. We have the same work that we do each and every Sunday when we come together. We are trying to motivate ourselves and one another to be the people of God who see the marginalized, the suffering, those who are being burdened by weights that are way too big for any one person to carry. And we jump into that. That is commanded in Deuteronomy, and it is splashed all over the good word that God has for you.

The last thing that Moses wants to give the people is to tell them it's important that you remember. This is all the more certain with what we've had in communion today. We do this to remember—to remember God's love and what we're called into. We come together to remember. And when we remember what we're called to be, and that God's law is life-giving, and that it is right and good that we come together and worship as a community, then we are the people of God. Then we have an opportunity to enter into the promised land that is intended for us. And we can find that promised land not just at some end of the rainbow at the end of our life, but we can find that promise fulfilled in the Monday through Saturday life that you live because you are then a person of God—a person of worship, mercy, love, grace, and forgiveness.

Moses is worried about his people and isn't sure that they're going to make it in the days ahead, so he really wants to give that great last set of speeches. We need to gather on a regular basis and remind ourselves of the very same things that were so important all those years ago because even today they give you the opportunity to experience the fullness that God has intended for you. Remember who God is. Remember who you are. Remember all that you've been taught and then go out there and live it.

Hallelujah. Amen.