

Deuteronomy: Whole-hearted love The God Who Governs History Deuteronomy 2:1-23"

Having turned to Deuteronomy chapter two, I would just remind you before we read that we do have our evening service this evening, where we will come to Mark chapter two. So we're kind of tracking along Mark alongside Deuteronomy. So we're in the second chapter of Mark. And here we'll actually get to see the passage where Jesus encounters a paralytic man. And interestingly, Mark slows down his pacing to give us a full account of this event, which is interesting. It's good to note, when does Mark say things quickly and when does he slow down? So come back and join us this evening for Mark chapter two.

But for this morning we are in Deuteronomy chapter two, verses one through twenty five. Your bulletin says one, two through twenty three. That's because I chose this morning to expand it a little bit just to cover those last two verses. So we will read chapter two, verses one through twenty five. This is the word of the Lord.

Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness in the direction of the Red sea, as the Lord told me. And for many days we traveled around Mount Seir. And then the Lord said to me, you have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward and command the people you are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Zaire, and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land. No, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall purchase food from them with money that you may eat, and you shall also buy water from them with money that you may drink. For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. And he knows you're going through this great wilderness these forty years. The Lord your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing. So we went on away from our brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir and away from the Arabah road from Elath to Ezion-geber. And we turned and went in the direction of the wilderness of Moab. And the Lord said to me, do not harass Moab, or contend with him in battle, for I am not. I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given are to the people of lot for a possession. Now the Emim formerly lived there, the people great, and many as tall as the Anakim. And like the Anakim, they are counted as Rephaim. But the Moabites call them Emim. Now the Horites also lived in Seir formerly. But the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them, and settled in their place, as Israel did, to the land of her possession, which the Lord gave to them. Now rise and go up over the brook. Zared. So we went over the brook. Zared. in the time from our leaving Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the brook Zared was, uh, thirty years until the entire generation, that is, the men of war had perished from the camp as the Lord had sworn to them. For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the camp until they had perished. So as soon as all of the men of war had perished and were dead from among the people, the Lord said to me, today you are to cross over the

border of Moab at R, and when you approach the territory of the people of Amon, do not harass them or contend with them. For I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession. Now it is also counted as a land of the Rephaim. The Rephaim formerly lived there, but the Ammonites called them Zamzani, a people great and many as tall as the Anakim. But the Lord destroyed them from before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place, as he did for the people of Esau, who lived in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites from before them, and they dispossessed them, and settled in their place even to this day. Now as for the Avim, who lived in the villages as far as Gaza, and who came from Caphtor, destroyed them, and settled in their place. Rise up, set out on your journey, and go over the valley of Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Surun the Amorite, the king of Heshbon, and his land begin to take possession of it, and contend with him in battle. This day I will begin to bring dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated.

Well, this somewhat long passage is really kind of part three. Now, we started with part one a couple of weeks ago, where we saw Israel resist the command of the Lord to go into Israel. And then we saw last week how then they wantonly and presumptuously tried to go into the land. Now, after the Lord had commanded them not to. And as a result, we now come to this week, which is the wilderness wandering. So, we could almost say we began with the wilderness wandering not being a thing in that first week, to the wilderness wandering, being triggered because of the unbelief of Israel, to now the wilderness wandering taking place. And it's important, as we look at this, we have this continuing theme throughout all of these passages of waiting. It's waiting for a long period of time for the Lord to complete his work in the people, and it brings to mind so many of the great crafts and workmanship that we have out there in the world that require time. There are just some things you can't do quickly. There's some things that require a honing, a kind of whittling down, a working into whatever the craft is in order to come to the right conclusion, to the right result.

As a matter of fact, one of the examples that comes immediately to my mind of this kind of work, the work that takes time, that requires waiting, is actually just illustrated in this grand device that you see behind me here up in the front of this church, that pipe organ. Now, many of you probably know this if you were around when this sanctuary was built, but many of you probably do not. Have you ever noticed that there aren't very many express installation services for pipe organs? You know, there's no twenty four hour pipe organ salesman around Birmingham. It's because you cannot put these in quickly. This is not a work that can happen overnight. To put it another way, it's not a matter of just getting all the materials together. As a matter of fact, we could say, well, this pipe organ is huge. That's why it takes a long time. Actually, that's not the part that takes a long time. Of all of the materials in there, the metal piping, the chords, the wood. Do you know that they all have to be brought into this space? Weeks, sometimes months, before you build the pipe organ that the wood actually has to become accustomed to the climate of the worship center in which it's going to be used, and so

do the pipes. You have to bring the pipes in. You can't just kind of ship them in from wherever they were manufactured and put them in place and have them start going. They have to sit for a while. They have to become attuned to this place. And then when the tuner comes, he has to hand tune each one of those pipes. Not so that it just sounds good in general. It's not like tuning a guitar. You know, if anyone's learned guitar, learned how to tune a guitar, you just kind of do that on the fly. Tuning these pipes, you tune the pipes for the room so that they operate in the context in which they're going to be used. So it's a long process.

I remember at my old church a few years ago, we replaced our original historic organ with a new organ. And I remember watching the process, and it was just months after months to get that organ in place. But once it's there and once you see the results of the time, because it's not just the materials and it's not just the craftsmanship, it's the time that comes out in the perfect harmonizing of the organ with the room in which it's being used. And you see, that's what's going on here in the wilderness, waiting that we find here the wilderness wandering of Israel. We're finding that the Lord is willing to put in the time in order to properly prepare his people to receive the blessing that he has in store for them. We even see here that it's forty years. There's a kind of a thirty eight year core in the middle of that forty years, but on either side, we get a full forty years to take that Exodus generation and make it a conquest generation.

So we're going to look at three things in our passage today. Three little aspects. These are just different aspects of what it means to wait on the Lord and what we learn here from this passage about that.

1. So first we're going to talk about divine patience in discipleship that the Lord is willing to put in the time to form his people. And that's not just true of ancient Israel. That's true of us today.
2. And then we're also going to look at divine providence in history, because one of the major sections of this whole story, right between verses five and twenty-three, really is about things that the Lord has been doing for other nations, not Israel.
3. And then lastly, we end up with divine provision to his people. What happens when the waiting time comes to an end and it's time to receive?

So let's start at the first section here, verses one through three, as well as verse seven and fourteen, all of which are passages that deal with God's willingness to wait to hold his people back and to work on them over time. You see, though, the wilderness wandering is largely gapped in the book of Deuteronomy, you notice that he just says it in a sentence. It's forty years. He just he just says it. It just happens. It's kind of like I think about as a parent of small children, people used to tell me, you know, it's long days, but short years, right? You know, you can imagine it was a long. It was long days on the road where you're in the desert and you're not sure where your food is going to come from or where your water is going to come from, and you can't step as he even says here, certain places you can't step to the left or to the right, lest you invoke a national war. Those were long days. And yet in Moses memory it passes in the blink of an eye. But what do we see here in this wandering? We see that it takes time. There's some things that just can't happen overnight. You know, I remember talking to a young man. I

had multiple conversations of this type, but one kind of stood out to me is back when I was in seminary, I was teaching at the seminary, and I had a lot of young guys come through who were often interns, or they were in staff positions at churches. I remember this one guy coming in. He was really gifted student, a very bright individual, but he came into my office. He was so frustrated. He told me, he said, you know, they just don't know how to do church. So, the leadership, they just don't know what they're doing. They're shooting themselves in the foot left and right. If they just did this and this and this, you know, our church could really thrive. Now remember, his ideas weren't bad ideas. They were all good ideas. They were possibly even the right ideas for that time and that place in the church. And his desire to lead in ministry was just a natural outworking of his calling to be a minister. And yet, what was the problem? He was still in seminary. He hadn't even been working in a church before. He hadn't gone through the experiences that pastors and ministers and elders and deacons and other leaders in the church go through. He hadn't had the failures to learn from. He hadn't had the successes that he could then line up and say, okay, here's a good practice. And I had to tell him, I said, brother, everything that you are desiring, the object of your desire is a good thing. Leadership the church to thrive, right? The church to do the gospel. Well, those are all good things. But here's the problem your timing is off. This isn't the time for you to be in that position. And I remember at the time, this was years ago, him kind of begrudgingly agreeing and going on his way. You see, we often show up early and ask the Lord to provide. But how do we respond when his answer, as it often is, is, wait, the object of your desire is not wrong. But it's time to wait. It's time to be prepared for the thing that you desire. It's time to be shaped right, to be shaped on that road to receiving the blessing, right? If I gave it to you now, it wouldn't be the blessing that you desire it to be. The object is fine. The timing is wrong. How do we respond when the Lord answers in that way.

I think there's a unique kind of pain that comes with being told to wait, whatever that is, whether it's waiting for the job that you want or waiting on having the ability to follow through with the responsibilities of that job once you get it or, or maybe it's waiting for a spouse or, or waiting for a friend to just come around or waiting to have children. Or maybe it's waiting to see if your children are going to turn out well and you know, you're just waiting and waiting and waiting. There's a pain that comes with that. And yet it's often through the pain that we learn what the Lord is calling us to, that we see how he's doing the important work of discipleship.

You know, our good friend C.S. Lewis, who says things so well, has a comment on this. He talks about how the Lord will sometimes reveal himself to us in our pleasures in life, and we get to see the glory of his pleasures. You know, you get to go on a hike and you see the beauty of the mountains and the exhilaration of being out there. And the Lord teaches us. He speaks to us through those things, and he also speaks to us through our conscience. That tells us inside of us, you know, kind of what we ought to do. And it brings to mind Scripture and illuminates the pathway of our lives. But he also speaks to us through pain. And Louis says, it's often in the pain that the Lord is the most clear. He says this. Louis says we can ignore even our pleasure so we can get pleasure, but we can ignore it. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks in our conscience, but he shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. You see, there's a unique pain in the long,

slow waiting of preparation and of training and of equipping. See, when we're in those situations and the pain comes, often the result is one of blaming.

We see this with Israel, don't we? When Israel is now told to wait, right? What do they do? They grumble. We actually if we go back to numbers and we read about the wilderness wandering, we realize it wasn't a time of joy for Israel. It was a time of grumbling and anger and dissatisfaction. Even sometimes saying we'd rather not be saved, we'd rather go back to Egypt, because at least there I knew where my meal would come from. You see, the waiting was a painful waiting. And so we tend to blame others. We blame the people around us. We blame the government. We blame the world. We blame Satan for the suffering that we're going through. And while that is legitimate, there's a lot of blame to go around. No doubt. We must always remember, even in the cases where the blame is legitimate, we have to still ask ourselves, like Israel was supposed to ask herself, What are you teaching me, Lord? I don't want to squander the waiting. I don't want to squander the pain that you are using as a megaphone to shout into my life. It's crucial that we don't squander the opportunity that he gives us when he calls us to wait on him.

Now, if you're involved in other people's lives, whether you're a minister or a congregational community leader, or a discipleship group leader, or a Bible study leader, or a parent, or just a good friend, if you are involved in people's lives, you will hear them blame people for the problems that they are dealing with, right? Actually, for many of us, and I'm counting myself in this number. Okay, brothers and sisters. Okay. For many of us, sharing your complaints and your blames is kind of like a love language, right? It's how you show, like we're close. Because I'm going to tell you all the people who are to blame for my problems. That's how I show you my love, right? You're on the inner ring now. Okay. And what's important, you know, as a minister, but as a parent, as a good friend, is when you hear that, you know the result, we shouldn't just sit there and kind of shove that off and ignore it. But what do we do? We get to see when people tell us about the problems and who's at fault for the problems. What do we get to see? We get to see a little glimpse into their heart of what they're struggling with. It's key for a pastor to note that where are people feeling the hot points? Where are the struggles? Where are the besetting sins? Where are the points of frustration? Where are the points of exasperation? How can I come alongside them and care for them in an important way? But here's the thing. While it reveals that we must remember as now the people who are in waiting, we must remember. Don't squander your waiting by blaming everybody else. Don't squander what the Lord is teaching you in the preparation. The Lord loves to work in us and he is patient to work in us over time. He's patient with Israel, takes forty years, and he's patient in our lives as well. Sanctification, right? If you're if you're new to the Christian church, sanctification is that work by which now, having been saved, the Lord now is conforming you to him. And we often think about that as like a moral thing. It's like you're having victory over sins. And that's true. It does include that. But I'd actually argue sanctification is much greater than that. Sanctification is you slowly realizing who the God of your salvation is and what he has accomplished on your behalf. And it takes a long time.

You think you get it. When you became a Christian, you think you get it. You know when you're when you've been a Christian for fifteen years, you think you've got it. When you've been a

Christian for forty years, it takes the whole of your life to really find yourself being drawn and sanctified and conformed to Christ. Sanctification is measured in lifetimes. Now, let me add an aside here. God is divinely patient. He loves to wait with us over time and draw us to him in a way that will be effective, just like the building of the pipe organ that will be effective and harmonious with what he's called us to do. He loves to do that, but he's also a father who loves to give generously. And let me tell you, it is better. It is beautiful and it is a wonderful thing. It is better and a wonderful thing to learn by faith and not by experience. What a great prayer! Go to the Lord and say, Lord, I want the humility that you call me to. I want the wisdom that you have on offer. I want the worship that you desire, a heartfelt worship, a wholehearted love. I want all of those things, and I'd like to learn them through faith and not have to learn them through experience. That's a great prayer. That's a great thing to yearn for in life. It is better to learn by faith than by experience.

Now, we often don't learn. It's because of who we are, right? We don't learn by faith. We often learn by experience. Ask any parent or anyone who's ever worked with a child in a building that has a kitchen, and in that kitchen has a stove. Right? And you say, stay away from the stove. And what do they do? They start kind of tiptoeing over toward the stove. Right. And you say, stay away from the stove. It's hot. And they see their hand going up on the top of it. Well, let me tell you, you can learn that a stove is hot by faith, and you can learn that a stove is hot by experience. And it's much better to not have that red metal coiled scar on your hand because you had to learn it by experience. You're going to learn it either way. God loves us. He will teach us either way. But it's a good prayer to say, Lord, I want to know through faith. Don't make me experience the result of my sin. Let me just believe you. And when you say what you say. So God is divinely patient with us in discipleship. But notice this other important point that Moses chooses to make to the Israelites in remembering the wandering is the sidebar for verses five through twenty-three, where he goes on an extended exposition of what it means for God to relate to and have power over the events of human history. Do you notice that it almost gets repetitive as we are reading it right? I have not given you this land. Rather, I gave it to them. They took the land when I gave it to them. They also in that land had a group of people who were quite intimidating, but they still took the land, right? But I'm not giving that land to you. Right? You see the cycle. Moses is reminding Israel that the wilderness wandering is about the Lord being patient with them to disciple them, but it's also a way for them to learn that God is not just at work in Israel. Now notice the way Moses says it. Moses does not give a caveat in here. He doesn't make a distinction between the Moabites and the Ammonites and Israel. He says, actually, quite bluntly, I offered you a land that had intimidating people in it, and you didn't take it. I gave it to these folks, the descendants of Lot, and they did take it. You see, there's a lesson here. You notice how he says they were as tall as the Anakim, right? The Anakim is what the Israelites were afraid of when they were promised the Promised Land. Remember that. That's what they said. They said there are people as tall there. We think they might be descendants of the Anakim. And I talked about how there's these legendary characters, and I said, there's a whole group of these individuals in the Bible that go back into history, and they're just great warriors of enormous size. We know precious little about them. I said this a few weeks ago, but I'll say it again. But notice, a lot of people had these same kind of accounts, this this memory of these people here in Moab. They call them the emim, which

probably means something like, um, uh, terrible ones. Okay. Then you have this other name for them. They're called the Zamzam. Okay. Elsewhere. And we don't know exactly what that is. If we had to take a guess, I'd say that's not really a Hebrew or a Semitic word. That's a loan word from somewhere else, because it's interesting. Just the structure of it doesn't even look. Doesn't it look interesting? Even if you don't know Hebrew, you're kind of like, that's not a normal looking word that I see in the Bible. The Zamzam, we don't know exactly who they are either, but they're all under this broader class of Rephaim. And if you remember when we talked about this a few weeks ago, we learned about the Rephaim being these great, powerful soldiers who are remembered here as being both big in size and also big in population. So they were tall and there were many of them. And in both cases, Israel learns these unbelieving nations went in and were brave and confident and receive the gift that the Lord was giving them. But Israel. He doesn't say it, and yet it's kind of in the background. Moses is saying, Israel, you weren't even willing to do it, and God spoke to you. And now let's be clear, the Lord does have a different relationship with Israel than he does with the Moabites and the ammonites and all of those different ones. He has a different relationship with them. And what is that different relationship? He is bound to them by covenant. He was not bound to the others by covenant. And yet notice he is still at work at moving human history, even amongst nations that are not his people.

There's two lessons here. One of them is this, Israel. They should have been bold. He's reminding them again. I've done this before. You could have just received my word and followed me. Second lesson is this there is no nation. There is no war. There is no king. There's no army, there's no president. There is no grand financial crisis that is outside the sovereign control of God. This is as difficult for Israel to understand as it is for us. We are with Israel. We are with Abraham. We're with Joseph. We're with Moses. We're with David in the fact that we both we all have to try to wrestle with this idea that our God is not just a local God who we pray to when we have headaches, though, we can do that. And that's amazing. But he is actually a global cosmic God who, while he is listening to our prayers and answering our prayer about our children, or about our aching hearts, or about our headaches as he's listening to those individual prayers, he is also orchestrating the events on the farthest reaches of the universe. He has also got his hand on the situation in China. He's also actively involved in what's happening in sub-Saharan Africa. He is moving the course of history forward and that should blow our minds. That should lead us as it leaves Abraham kind of staggering back and saying, I don't know how he's going to do it in this case, provide a lamb, but I know he's going to do it. You see this reality, the reality of a God who reigns over the whole of the heavens and the earth, is a unique teaching in Scripture. Christians, this is not something that the other faiths believe. Okay. And if you find another faith that teaches something like this, I'll bet you money they got it out of scripture. Okay. You see, this is our God's nature. This is the God of the Bible's character. This is who you come to worship here. And yes, we believe he's uniquely present here, but he is also ubiquitously present all over the universe. You see, that's why we can't say there's many ways up the religious mountain that there's many ways to be saved. And Jesus is just one of them, because the God that Jesus reconciles us to is the God of all creation. I just want to be clear about this. It's not as if God is the God of all creation. You understand this is not like religiously speaking, God is the God of all creation. Or from my point of view, God is the

God of all creation or by my lights. And because of my upbringing, God is the God of all creation. God is literally and absolutely the God of all creation, and therefore there cannot be many ways up the mountain because he has said there is only one way up the mountain, and that is through Jesus Christ, His son. So you see, God is divinely patient with us in our discipleship. He's divinely providential over the course of all of human history, even those who Israelites would call their enemies, he sovereignly at work in their lives. And then lastly, verses twenty four to twenty five, God divinely provides the divine provision of his people in the waiting. So we've talked about divine patience and discipleship, divine providence over the course of history. But now we can't stop with out pointing out where Moses goes with this. He's laid out, these are all of the people you cannot don't even step to the left or the right on the trail. You got to stay single file, single track as you go through Moab and eat them. Those aren't your lands. Those are their lands. Okay. And yet there comes a point in verse twenty four. And look what Moses says. Or look what the Lord says to Israel. Having laid out how God has been present throughout all of creation, he says this verse twenty four, now rise up, set out on your journey, and go over to the valley of the Arnon. Behold, I have given you. What has he been saying so far? I am not giving you the Moab, Moabites or Edomites or the ammonites land. But behold, I am giving you into your hand. Sehon, the Amorite king of Heshbon and his land begin to take possession of it and contend with him in battle. What do we do when the time for waiting and preparation has now come to an end? What do we do? When? Now. The season is a season of receiving. It's hard to receive, particularly after an extended period of waiting. It seems like it's easy because you've been waiting and waiting and waiting and yearning for the thing. And yet, when it finally comes, if you've ever been in that experience, it can be hard to lay hold of it. And that's for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's just the fact that it's hard to move out of a season that, you know, even if that's a season of discomfort into a new season that you don't know. Oftentimes we choose the pain. We know over the relief. We don't know. That's just human nature. It's a good reminder to us that even while we're waiting, even while we're being tested, even while we're doing this thing that Paul calls mortifying the flesh. Right? You don't have it now. And yet we're yearning for the thing you've got to always remember. And when that thing comes, the whole reason why I'm waiting is so that I can receive the blessing. Our God is not a God of self-denial. This isn't some kind of Buddhist rejection of what desire is, or something like that, because it's all an illusion. Our God doesn't believe in that. He doesn't teach us that. He says, no, you are waiting for a thing. The wandering is a wandering toward a thing. The wandering is a pilgrimage. But it can be difficult. It can also sometimes be hard to believe that the God of discipline, the God of discipleship, is also the God of generosity and abundance. But we have to remember that, too. He's not disciplining us just because he likes to see us squirm. This isn't some kind of, like, just tough love. Because that's how your personality goes, O Lord. He is disciplining us so we can fully receive the abundance. He's preparing us so that we can enjoy it. I am convinced of this. I'm convinced that there are going to be believers in heaven who enjoy heaven better, more than I do, because they'll know even more than I do how glorious that salvation is. As a matter of fact, as you think about your sanctification in life, think about it this way I want my heart to be able to squeeze every drop of joy out of the new heavens and new earth. I want to live in such a way that when we get there, I can say I am fully enjoying the glory of God.

You see, it can be hard to move from the waiting to the blessing, but this happens in our lives. Like I said, it happens in jobs. It happens in relationships. It happens in our marriages and in our families. It can happen in our church. There can be seasons of waiting in the church and then seasons of receiving. And that's a beautiful thing. However, we should also always remember this because this was as true for Israel as it is for us that the wilderness wandering in the conquest of the Promised Land was never the end goal. All of this was just practice for the grand cosmic wait to be over.

In Romans eight, Paul, when he's talking about creation, he says, creation waits with earnest expectation that language of earnest expectation is really the same language that's used to describe a woman who is about to give birth, and she's in the pains of childbirth. That's the kind of waiting that creation has been under for all of history, and is waiting for this grand arrival. And at the end of the day, all of our waiting is the same. We are all practicing. We are all being liturgically formed. For what? For that day when the Lord will say to us, as he says to Israel. Rise up, take the land that I've given you, and we rise up into a glorious new reality of the new heavens and new earth, lives that are not pained by waiting, bodies that are not pained by the decay of death, hearts and spirits that are not weighted down by the influence of sin. And when that day comes, the discipleship will now just be cause for worship. The memory of the waiting will just be the minor chords in a beautiful song that lifts our hearts and glory. Because the waiting was never meant to be the end of the game. It was always to receive the blessing.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we come to you, we come as those who wait. Dear Lord, we come to you knowing that without your spirit we will not learn by experience or by faith. And so we pray, Lord, for that great imperishable seed of regeneration that the theologians talk about to be planted deep within us. Help us, Lord, to wait when the time for waiting comes. Help us, Lord, to lay hold of the blessing when the time of receiving comes.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.